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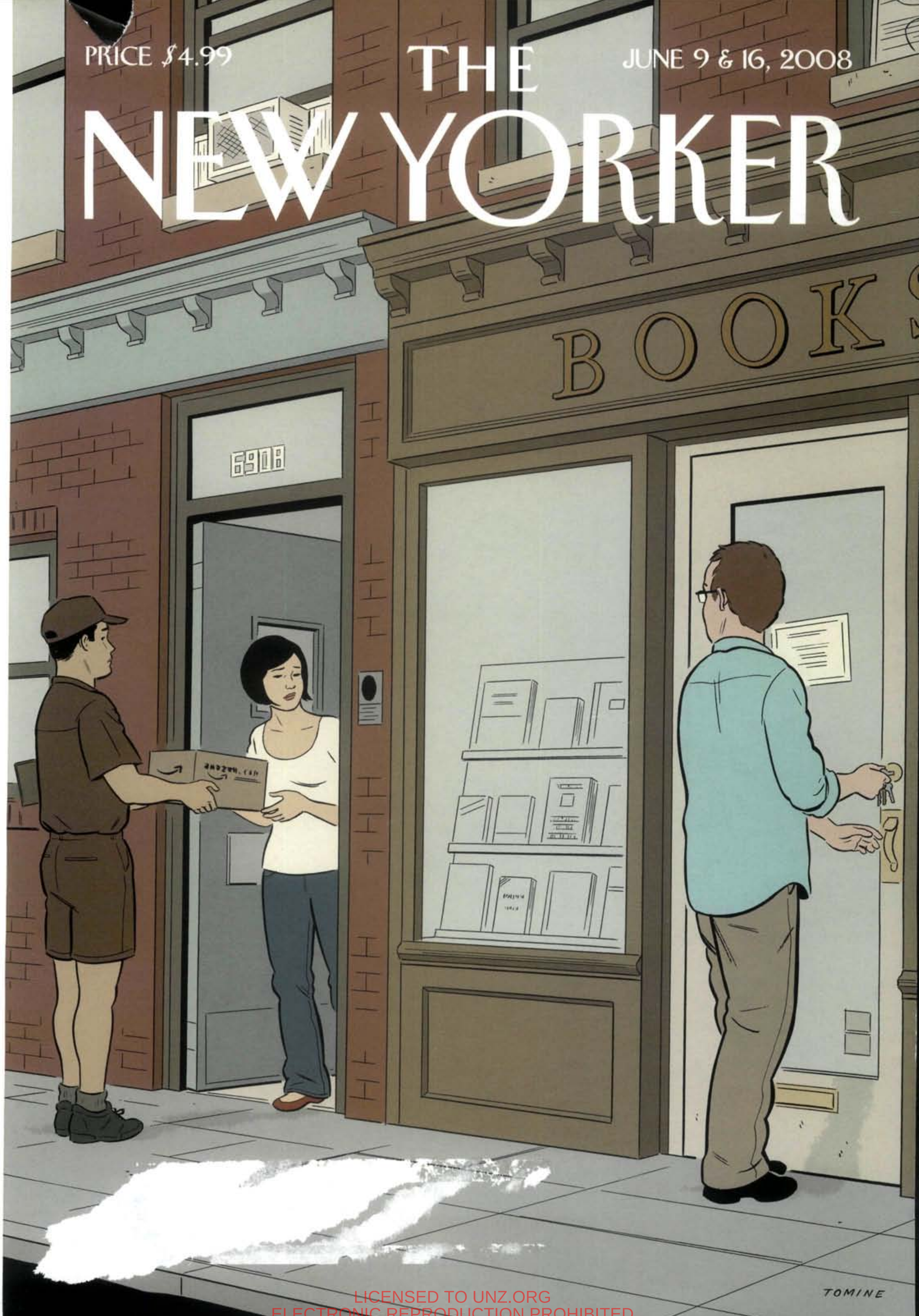
THE NEW YORKER

JUNE 9 & 16, 2008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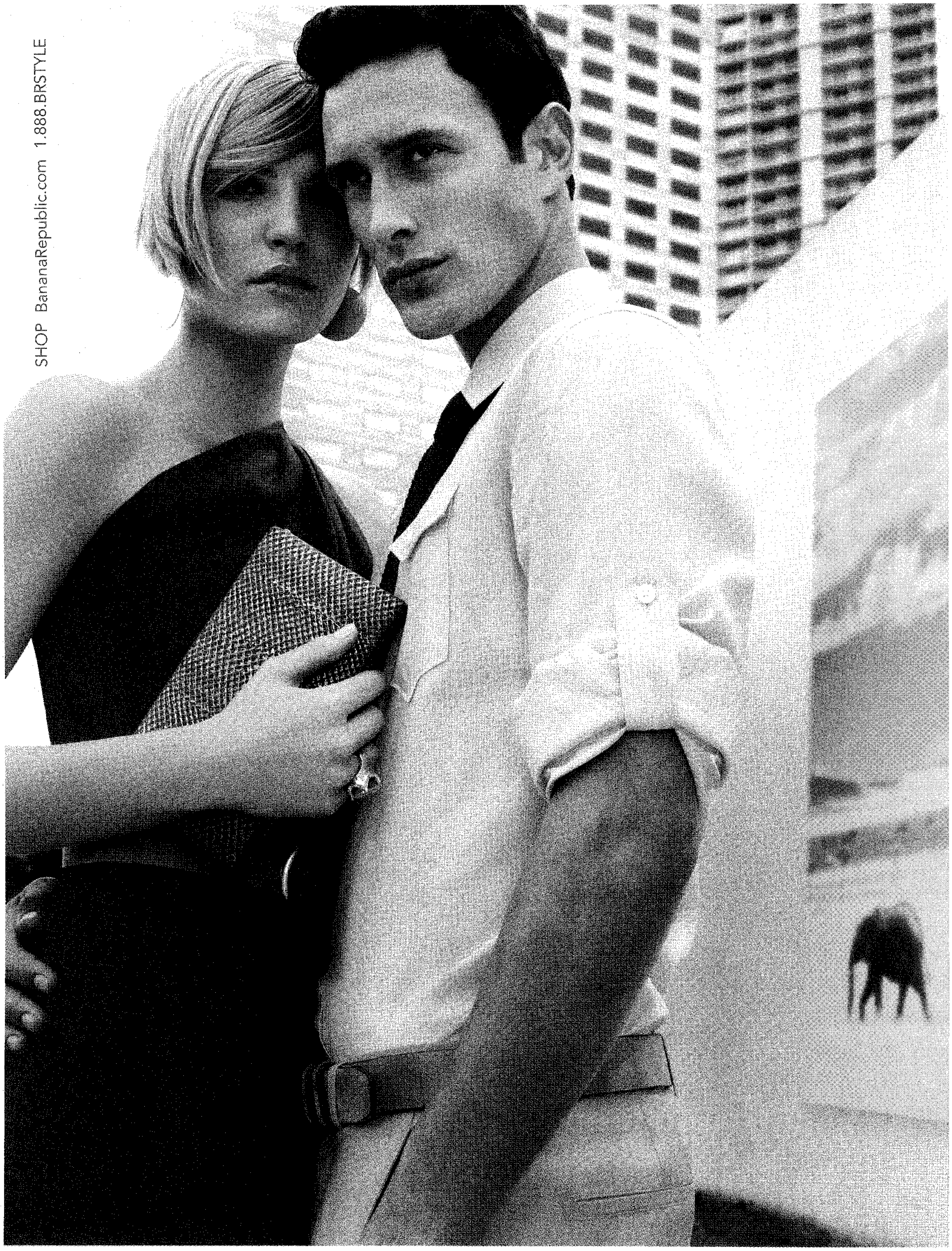
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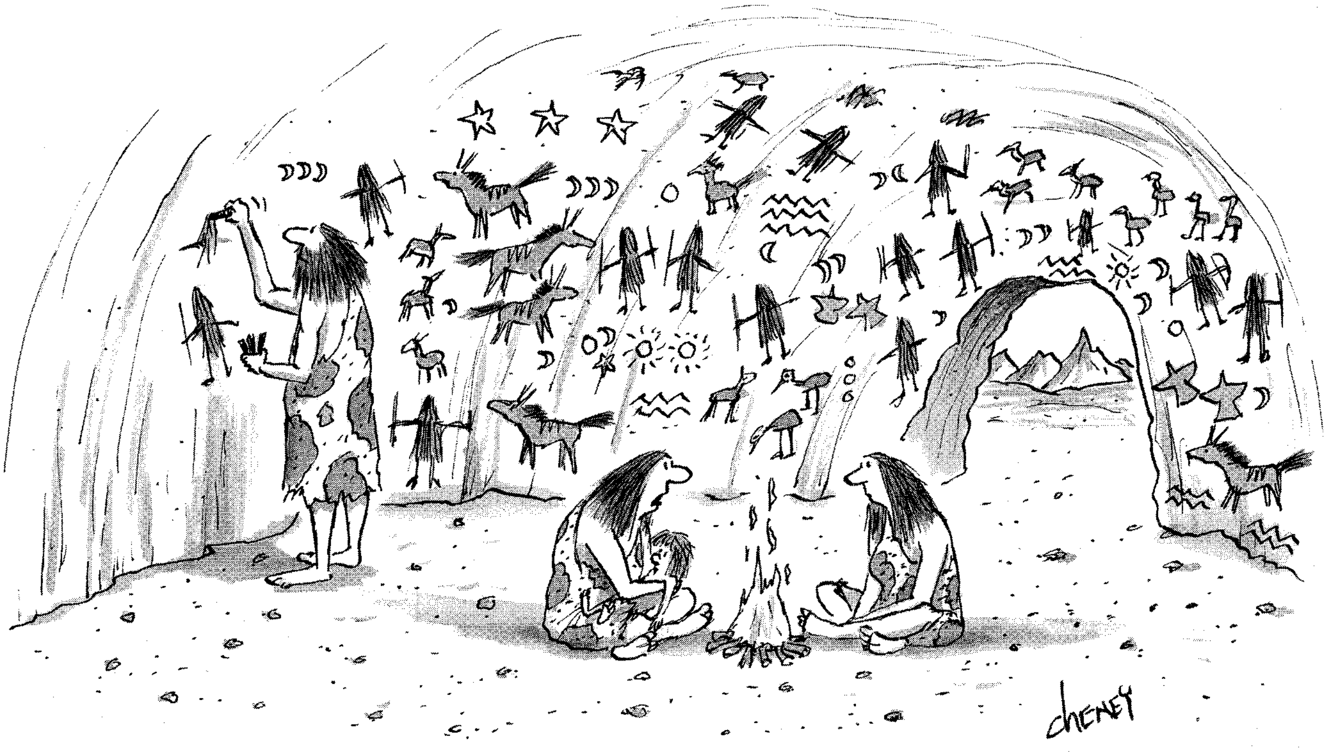
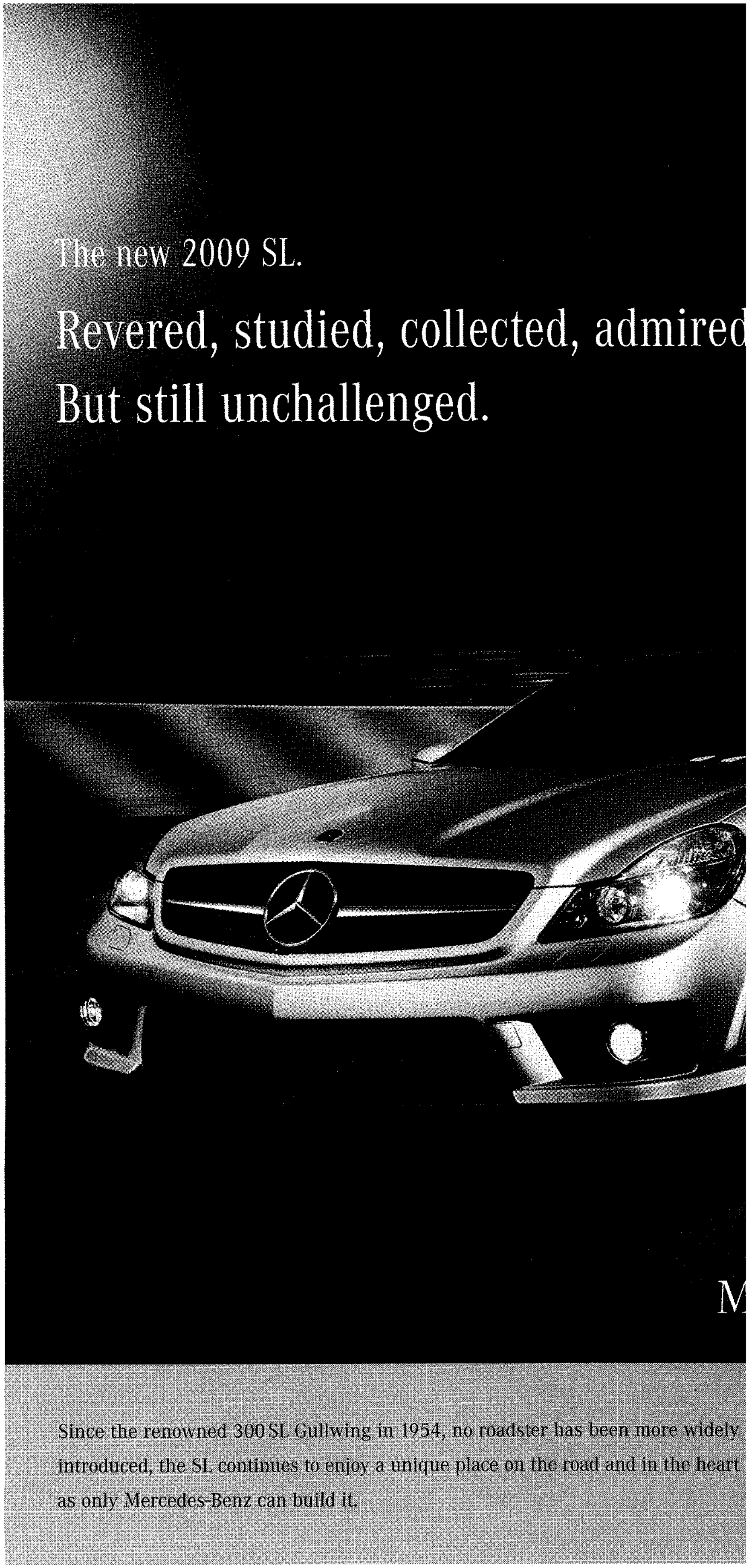


"We have to move every time he finishes a novel."



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CONTRIBUTORS

Vladimir Nabokov ("Natasha," p. 54) contributed to *The New Yorker* from 1942 to 1976. A new edition of "The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov" will be published later this year. This story appears here in English for the first time.

Philip Gourevitch (Comment, p. 45), the editor of *The Paris Review*, is the author of "Standard Operating Procedure," a collaboration with Errol Morris, which came out in May.

Uwem Akpan ("Communion," p. 62), who teaches at a seminary in Zimbabwe, will publish his first story collection, "Say You're One of Them," later this month.

Elizabeth Kolbert ("Dymaxion Man," p. 64) co-edited, with Francis Spufford, "The Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic and the Antarctic."

Tobias Wolff ("Winter Light," p. 70) recently published "Our Story Begins: New and Selected Stories."

Haruki Murakami ("The Running Novelist," p. 72) was awarded the Franz Kafka Prize in 2006. His new book, "What I Talk About When I Talk About Running," comes out next month.

Annie Proulx ("Tits-Up in a Ditch," p. 80) will publish a new collection of short stories, "Fine Just the Way It Is: Wyoming Stories 3," in September.

Edwidge Danticat ("Crabs," p. 78) received a 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for her memoir "Brother, I'm Dying."

Mohammed Naseehu Ali ("Mysteries of Flight," p. 85) is the author of "The Prophet of Zongo Street," a book of short stories. He is at work on his first novel.

Allegra Goodman ("Counting Pages," p. 90) has a new novel, "The Other Side of the Island," coming out in September.

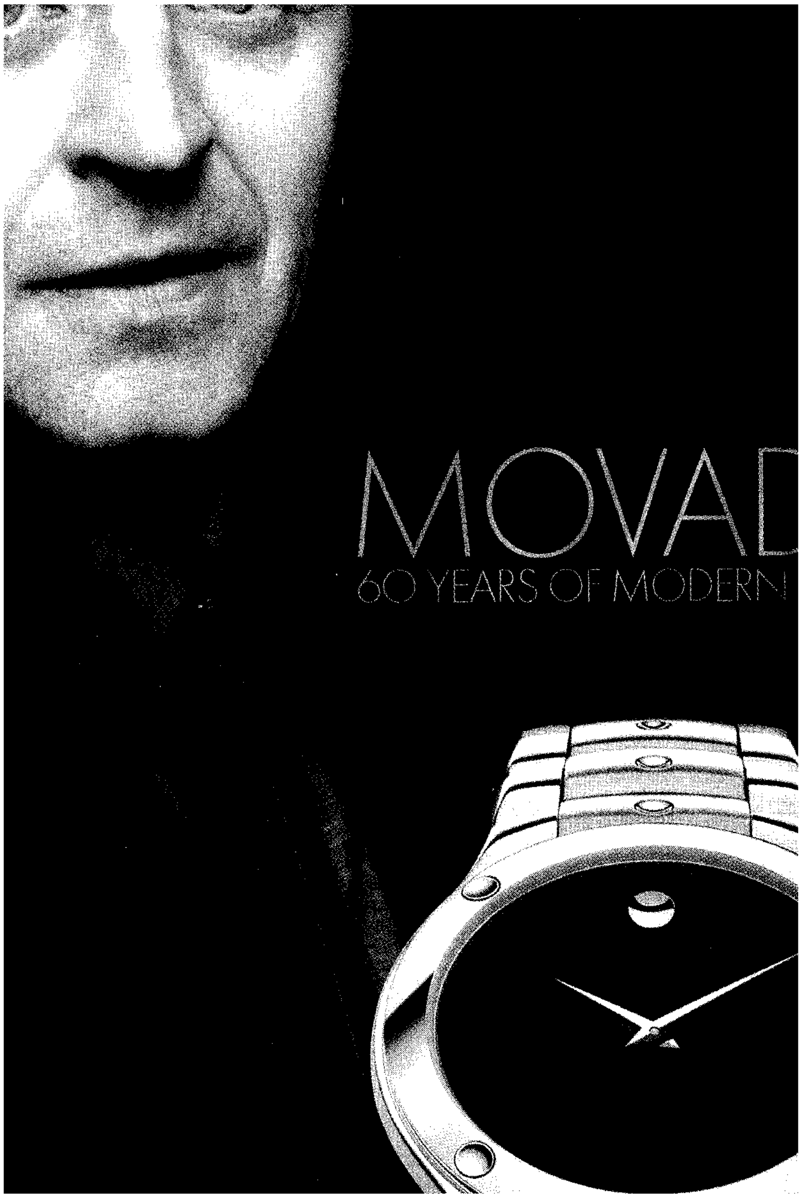
Mary Gaitskill ("Don't Cry," p. 96) is the author of two novels, "Two Girls, Fat and Thin" and "Veronica." Her third collection of stories will be published early next year.

George Saunders ("Hypocrites," p. 100) teaches at Syracuse University. His books include "In Persuasion Nation" and "The Braindead Megaphone," a collection of essays.

Adrian Tomine (Cover) is a writer and illustrator who has published five books, including "Shortcomings."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Mary Gaitskill reads a short story by *Vladimir Nabokov* on the monthly fiction podcast. / *Sasha Frere-Jones* processes his own voice through Auto-Tune to demonstrate the software. / Video from the 2008 New Yorker Conference. / The Book Bench, a new literary blog, plus blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *George Packer*, *Dana Goodyear*, and the editors of Goings On About Town. / From the archives: *John Updike* on Nabokov; *James Surowiecki* on old and new media; and thousands of book and film reviews. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.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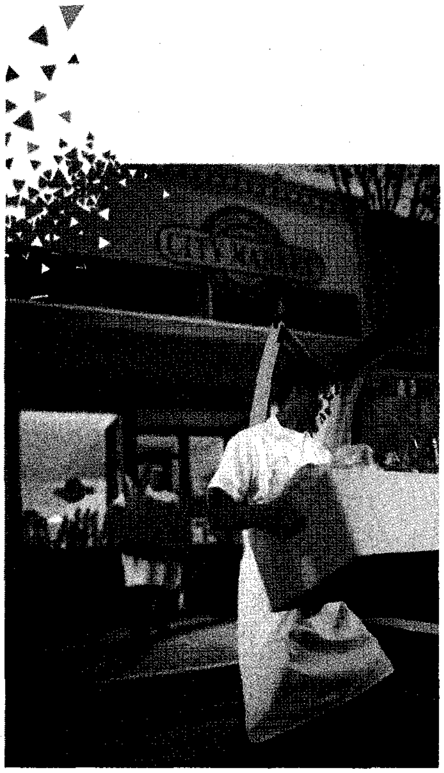

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REINVENTION

There are at least two problems with Malcolm Gladwell's argument that discovery is rarely individual ("In the Air," May 12th). The examples of output from the group-thinking approach used by Intellectual Ventures are all about technology, not about the foundational aspects of science. One can find many examples of individual discoveries—those of Évariste Galois for group theory and those of Josiah Willard Gibbs in thermodynamics. And Gladwell's argument that artistic innovation clearly depends on individuals rests, it seems to me, on style: if Beethoven had not lived, the Ninth Symphony would not exist, because there is clearly a style that is Beethoven's alone. Style is unique, and it matters as much in science as it does in art. The way in which an argument is made and how a theory holds together are often as important as the result itself.

Julio M. Ottino
Dean, R. R. McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science
Northwestern University
Evanston, Ill.

By filing hundreds of patents each year, Nathan Myhrvold's Intellectual Ventures could end up slowing, instead of driving, innovation, as his company may lay claim to intellectual property from other firms. As Gladwell notes in his piece, "simultaneous discovery" is common in technology and often leads to unhappy results. The patent hoarding at I.V. could mean legal tussles over who owns the actual innovation, and should be cause for a revisiting of patent law, not for the celebration of a company propagating the problem.

Chris Harrick
Oakland, Calif.

Gladwell cites Stephen Stigler's Law ("No scientific discovery is named after its original discoverer"), and says that Robert K. Merton earlier noted the phenomenon. Clearly, the ownership of a big idea or discovery is as complicated as Gladwell suggests. Consider the comments of two who precede Merton. Joseph Schumpeter in 1951: "The intellectual achievement of an analyst does not consist in the content of the statement which expresses the fundamental principle, but in his knowing how to make it fertile and how to derive from it all the problems of the science concerned." Alfred North Whitehead in 1917: "But to come very near to a true theory, and to grasp its precise application, are two very different things, as the history of science teaches us. Everything of importance has been said before by somebody who did not discover it."

John E. Morrill
Professor Emeritus of Mathematics
DePauw University
Greencastle, Ind.

In Gladwell's essay, I was surprised to find a new version of the old myth about the invention of the telephone—the story that the telephone was born when Alexander Graham Bell spilled battery acid on himself and called out to Thomas Watson for help. In fact, March 10, 1876, the day Watson heard Bell through the wire, was a day completely without drama. There is no mention of the battery-acid accident in Bell's log of the day. "The first recorded message was commonplace," Watson complained in letters. "There was little of dramatic interest in the occasion." It wasn't until fifty years later, in 1926, when Watson sat down to write his lovely memoir, "Exploring Life," that the battery-acid story was born. Watson was an old man, Bell was dead, and the past had become dim and malleable. Watson had been a brilliant engineer, geologist, actor, and writer, whose fabulous inaccuracy has become part of history. I come from a family of inspired storytellers, and Watson, who was my great-grandfather, was one of the best.

Susan Cheever
New York City

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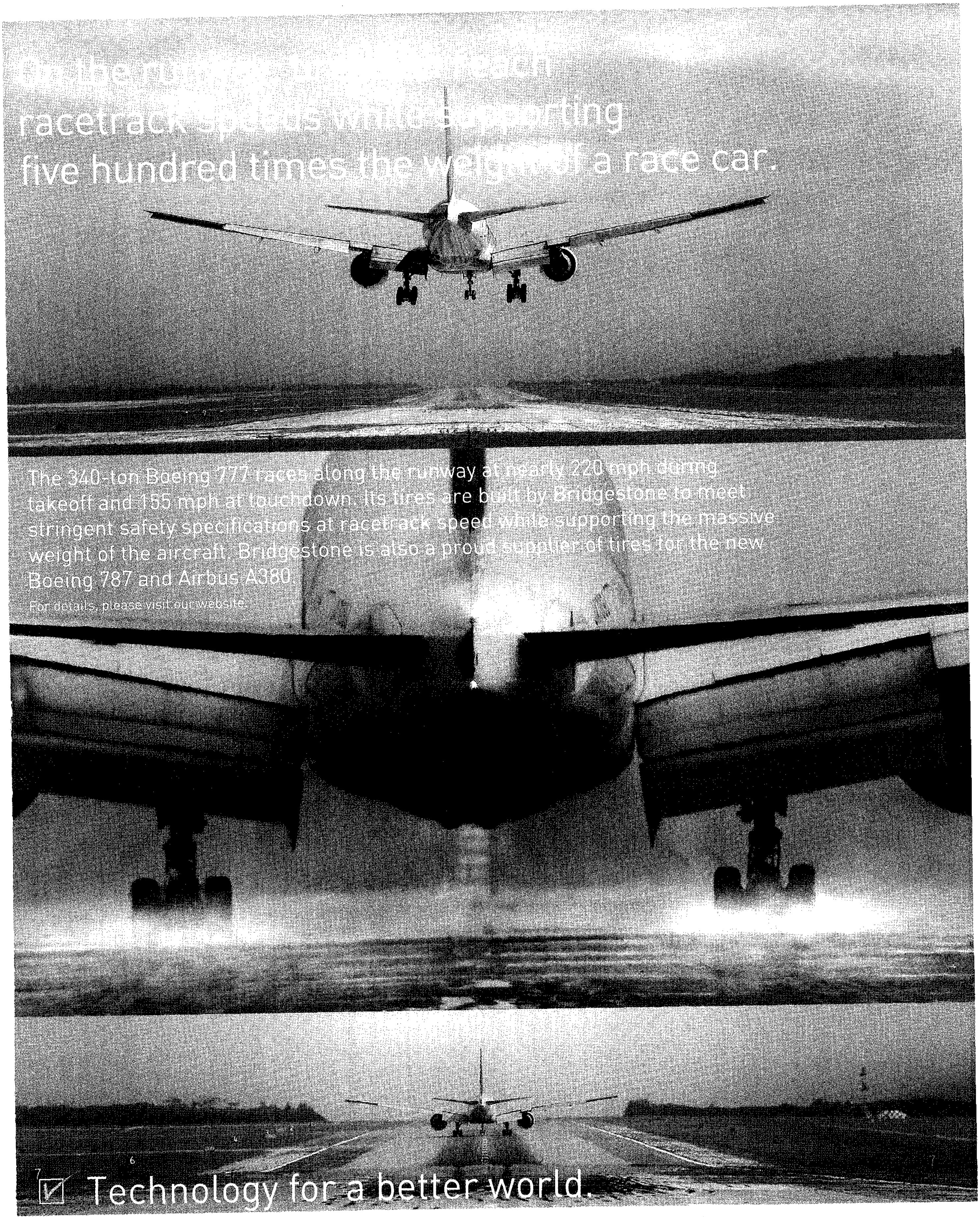
Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

On the runway, tires must reach racetrack speeds while supporting five hundred times the weight of a race car.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
PLAYING HOUSE

The playwright Christopher Durang has a rather extensive list of bit-part credits in movies dating back three decades, including "The Secret of My Success," "Housesitter," and "The Out-of-Towners." He has also acted in his own plays: in the début of his comedy "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" (in 1985), an autobiographical account of his parents' union, he played the son. The play is now being revived by the Roundabout at the Laura Pels. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
LUCKY PAIR

Last year, the rock god Robert Plant and the bluegrass angel Alison Krauss released "Raising Sand," an album of engagingly restrained, richly textured duets that became an alt-country hit. T Bone Burnett, who produced the album, joins them on guitar for their shows at the WaMu Theatre at Madison Square Garden. (See page 19.)

ART
DRAWING INSPIRATION

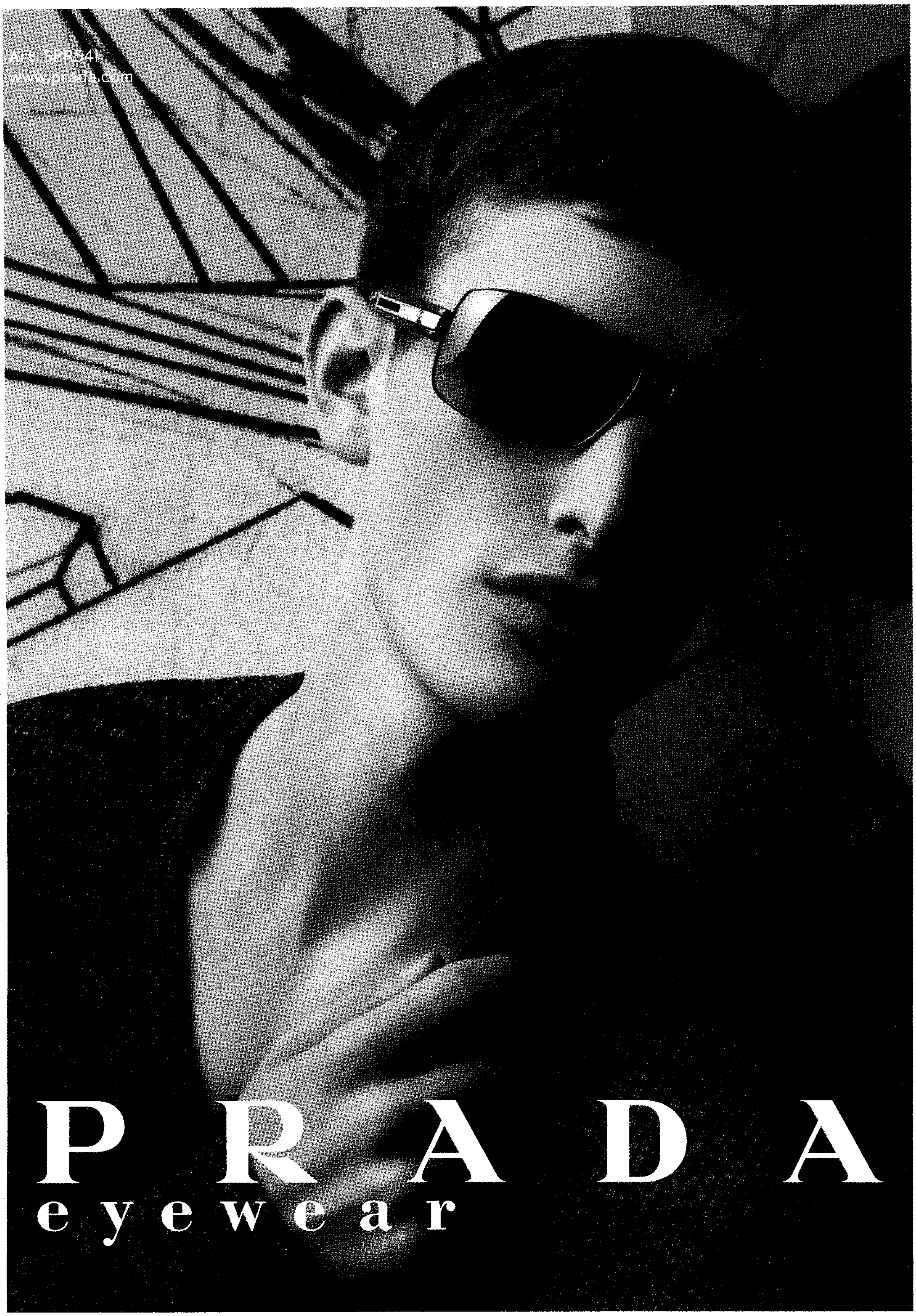
The visceral energy, dark humor, and cartoonish line of Philip Guston's late works remain touchstones for artists more than twenty-five years after his death. The New York painter Carroll Dunham will discuss the artist's influence with the curator Robert Storr at the Morgan Library, in conjunction with its new show "Philip Guston: Late Drawings." (See page 22.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BIG BANG

The last month of Lorin Maazel's penultimate season at the helm of the New York Philharmonic is almost impossibly grand; the next two weeks alone feature performances of Mahler's Ninth Symphony and of a concert version of Puccini's "Tosca." (See page 28.)

MOVIES
THEIR CLOSEUPS

MOMA's ongoing program of weeklong premières offers a diverse range of noteworthy and unusual fare: Marco Bellocchio's dark comedy "The Wedding Director"; Isaac Julien's portrait of the late director Derek Jarman; and Pere Portabella's three-way romance, "Warsaw Bridge." (See page 35.)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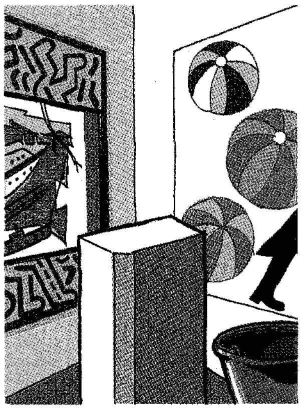
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
EXTREME MAKEOVER

Last year, when Urs Fischer excavated a hole—a gaping meditation on being and nothingness—in Gavin Brown's gallery, it was hard to imagine how he could top it. The unlikely answer: with wallpaper. The audacious pileup of visual pleasures and conceptual provocations in "Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?," at Tony Shafrazi, conceived by Brown and Fischer, starts with a trompe-l'oeil stunt. A full-scale, hyperreal photomural of Shafrazi's last show (paintings, mostly, by the eighties honchos Donald Baechler, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Kenny Scharf) wraps around the walls, launching a game of exquisite corpse played with real pieces (sculptures, photographs, a staircase-long waterfall) by twenty-two artists. A cadaverous head, an oil painted in 1949 by Francis Bacon, defaces a virtual Scharf, which is also obscured by Lily van der Stokker's mural-on-the-mural, the color and shape of chewed bubble gum. Rude girls (Sarah Lucas, Cady Noland) take the big boys hostage, and the Old Guard (Malcolm Morley, Robert Morris) looks new.

—*Andrea K. Scott*



PAUL HOPPE

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ARIAS WITH A TWIST
Joey Arias and Basil Twist join forces to perform a multimedia puppet show with live music, at HERE Arts Center. Previews begin June 12. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

BASH'D
A rap opera, written by and starring Chris Craddock and Nathan Cuckow (with music also by Aaron Macri), about a gay couple who retaliate when one of them is brutally beaten. Ron Jenkins directs. Previews begin June 12. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-352-3101.)

BODY AWARENESS
The world première of a play by Annie Baker, about a photographer of nude women who creates a scandal on a Vermont college campus. Karen Kohlhaas directs. Opens June 4. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

A BRUSH WITH GEORGIA O'KEEFFE
Robert Kalfin directs a drama about the life of O'Keeffe, including her relationship with Alfred Stieglitz, by Natalie Mosco. Previews begin June 7. Opens June 14. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

CIRQUE DREAMS "JUNGLE FANTASY"
Neil Goldberg created and directs this spectacle, which incorporates aerialists, contortionists, acrobats, jugglers, and musicians in a jungle setting. Previews begin June 16. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE COCKTAIL HOUR
Theater Breaking Through Barriers presents A. R. Gurney's comedy, about a young man who asks his parents' permission to produce a play about them. Ike Schambelan directs. In previews. Opens June 6. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A DANGEROUS PERSONALITY
Sallie Bingham wrote this play, presented by Perry Street Theatre, about Helena Blavatsky, who co-founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Martin Platt directs. In previews. Opens June 11. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

EDWARD ALBEE'S OCCUPANT
Signature Theatre Company presents Edward Albee's 2002 work about the sculptor Louise Nevelson, starring Mercedes Ruehl and Larry Bryggman. Pam MacKinnon directs. In previews. Opens June 5. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

FEMINAZI
Suzanne Willett wrote and performs this comedy, about the effect of strong women on our society. In previews. Opens June 5. (Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 212-239-6200.)

FREQUENCY HOPPING
Hourglass Group presents Elyse Singer's drama, about the actress Hedy Lamarr and the composer George Antheil, who together invented missile-tracking technology that is now used in cell phones. In previews. Opens June 7. (3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

HAMLET
Shakespeare in the Park opens with the tragedy, staged by Oskar Eustis (the artistic director of the Public) and starring Michael Stuhlbarg, Lauren Ambrose, Sam Waterston, and Margaret Colin. In previews. Opens June 17. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

THE HIRED MAN
A musical by Howard Goodall (music) and Melvyn Bragg (book), about English country life leading up to the First World War, is part of the "Brits Off Broadway" festival. Daniel Buckroyd directs. Previews begin June 6. Opens June 11. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

IN SEARCH OF MY FATHER . . . WALKIN' TALKIN' BILL HAWKINS
W. Allen Taylor's one-man show, about his father, Bill Hawkins, whom he never knew, and who was the first black d.j. in Cleveland. Previews begin June 5. Opens June 11. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

JOLLYSHIP THE WHIZ-BANG
Nick Jones wrote the book and lyrics for this pirate-puppet theatrical rock show by the troupe of the same name. Sam Gold directs. Opens June 4. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

MACBETH
Poland's TR Warszawa presents the Shakespeare tragedy, directed by Grzegorz Jarzyna, performed in a roofless theatre at the Tobacco Warehouse. A St. Ann's Warehouse production. Previews begin June 17. (Adjacent to the Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park. 718-254-8779.)

THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO
Roundabout Theatre Company presents Christopher Durang's dark comedy, about a couple's long history of alcoholism and nervous breakdowns. Walter Bobbie directs. Previews begin June 12. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

PALACE OF THE END
Epic Theatre Ensemble presents Judith Thompson's comic drama, about the Iraq war. Daniella Topol directs. Previews begin June 11. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

PENALTIES & INTEREST
Rebecca Cohen's comedy, directed by John Gould Rubin, about the harried lives of three working women. Part of the "Public Lab" series. Opens June 10. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

A PERFECT COUPLE
WET presents a play by Brooke Berman, about a couple who are getting married after many years together. Maria Mileaf directs. Previews begin June 9. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE RAVEN
Ellen Stewart adapted, composed, and directs this musical, based on a story by Carlo Gozzi, transposed to China, about a king who is placed under a curse after shooting a bird. In Mandarin and English. Previews begin June 12. Opens June 15. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

SHOWBOAT
Carnegie Hall presents a one-night-only production of Kern and Hammerstein's musical, directed by Francesca Zambello, with music direction by Paul Gemignani. June 10. (881 Seventh Ave. 212-247-7800.)

SINGLE BLACK FEMALE
Colman Domingo directs Lisa B. Thompson's comedy, about middle-class single black women searching for love. Previews begin June 10. Opens June 12. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

SOME KIND OF BLISS
A young woman sets out to interview the pop singer Lulu and finds adventure, in Samuel Adamson's comedy, directed by Toby Frow. Part of the "Brits Off Broadway" festival. Previews begin June 11. Opens June 15. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SUMMERWORKS 2008
Clubbed Thumb hosts its annual festival of new plays, at the Ohio. Opens June 4. (66 Wooster St. 212-352-3101.)

THREE ON A COUCH
Carl Djerassi's comedy is about a writer who fakes his own death to see what people write about him. Elena Araoz directs. In previews. Opens June 8. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

VINCENT RIVER
Philip Ridley's drama, in the "Brits Off Broadway" festival, focusses on a woman whose son has died. Steve Marmion directs. Previews begin June 10. Opens June 15. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

ARTEFACTS
Mike Bartlett's play, in 59E59's "Brits Off Broadway" festival, packs more plot than it needs into an otherwise creditable, well-acted production. Its smart-mouthed teen-age heroine, Kelly (well played by Lizzy Watts), meets her father, Ibrahim (Peter Polycarpou), for the first time; she learns that he is Iraqi, and the director of the National Museum in Baghdad. As she simultaneously rails against him and tries to draw

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Cartier

him in, he presents her with an ancient artifact that he has taken for safekeeping: "This vase is Iraq; before Iraq it was Assyria, Mesopotamia. It is wisdom; it is beauty." If the idea that any father would entrust a sixteen-year-old with such a treasure strains credulity, it also sets in motion a plot rich in humor and pathos—and presents a devastating metaphor about current events that handily implicates us all. Directed by James Grieve. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through June 8.)

CYMBELINE
New York Classical Theatre kicks off its season of free, peripatetic al-fresco theatre with the Shakespeare romance, directed by Louis Scheeder. (Central Park, enter at W. 103rd St. 212-252-4531.)

LEN, ASLEEP IN VINYL
Second Stage's Uptown Series begins with a dark comedy by Carly Mensch, about a music producer who reunites with his estranged son. Jackson Gay directs. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

PORT AUTHORITY
With this drama (under the direction of Henry Wishcamper), Conor McPherson wants to explore how much the Irish soul can bear in its native land, where alcohol blunts the senses and religion ruins lives. In an eerily empty bus station, three passengers are waiting, seemingly unattached. First up is Kevin (John Gallagher, Jr.), the youngest of the trio, then the middle-aged Dermot (Brian d'Arcy James), followed by Joe (Jim Norton), who lives in an old-age home. Like Joe, Dermot and Kevin find themselves—or, more accurately, can see themselves—only through their relationships with women. And that's the drama here: how far can love carry you before the old fears reduce you to that small boy, trembling, neglected, in a corner? The payoff of the play is less in its action than in the secrets shared. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/2/08.) (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

PRISONER OF THE CROWN
In 1911, the Irishman Roger Casement was knighted by King George V for his humanitarian efforts in the Congo and Peru. Five years later, stemming from his efforts in Germany to gain support for a free Ireland, he was taken to London and tried, convicted, and hanged for high treason. Director Ciarán O'Reilly, a co-founder of the Irish Rep, has created a swirling, stirring revival of this fine play, a collaboration by Richard F. Stockton and Richard T. Herd from 1972. Evoking elements of "Twelve Angry Men," "A Man for All Seasons," and the trial of Oscar Wilde, it deftly intertwines the themes of politics, power, and prejudice. Eight skilled actors handle dozens of roles, and the transitions among the play's multiple settings are marvels of stagecraft. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

REASONS TO BE PRETTY
The world première of a comic drama by Neil LaBute, in which a man's comments about a co-worker's beauty get back to his girlfriend. Piper Perabo, Alison Pill, Thomas Sadoski, and Pablo Schreiber star; Terry Kinney directs. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

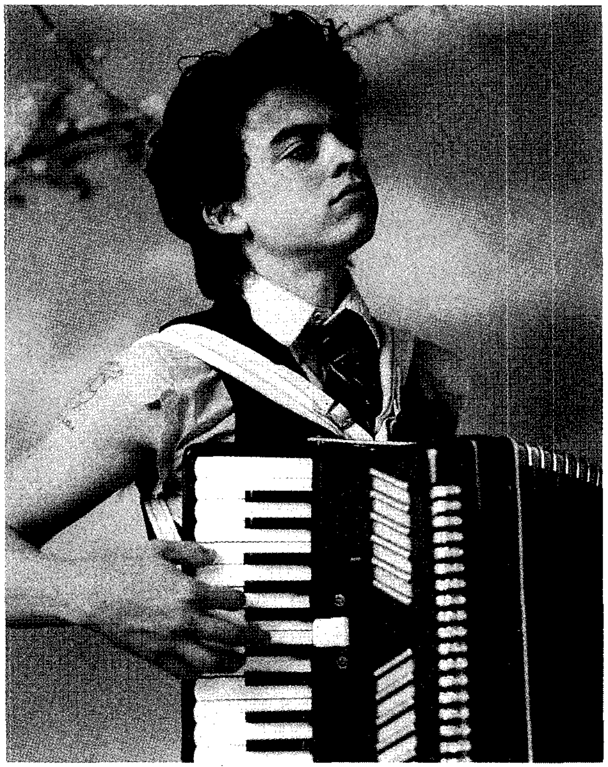
SAVED
The world première of a new musical based on the 2004 film, about various imbroglios at a Christian high school. With music and lyrics by Michael Friedman and a book and lyrics by John Dempsey and Rinne Groff. Gary Griffin directs. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
Charles Busch stars in his farce "Shanghai Moon," in which a married Englishwoman gets involved with a Chinese warlord. Carl Andress directs. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
Eric Hill directs Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker," from 1960, starring James Barry and Jonathan Epstein. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"Cymbeline," directed by Terrence O'Brien, begins performances June 10 on the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)



Novice Theory plays the Zipper Factory Theatre.

TINA TYRELL

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
Alex Timbers directs "Beyond Therapy," Christopher Durang's play about self-obsessed singles looking for love in the eighties. Opens June 11 at the Nikos. For a full festival schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ADDING MACHINE: Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BETRAYED:** Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Through June 16. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **A CATERED AFFAIR:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COUNTRY GIRL:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CRY-BABY:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-1400. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **FROM UP HERE:** City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **GREASE:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE GREAT AMERICAN ALL-STAR TRAVELING WAR MACHINE:** Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-352-3101. Through June 15. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HOW THEATER FAILED AMERICA:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. Through June 8. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **THE NEW CENTURY:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Through June 8. **NOVEMBER:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **PASSING STRANGE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **RAFTA, RAFTA . . .:** Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THURGOOD:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **TOP GIRLS:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

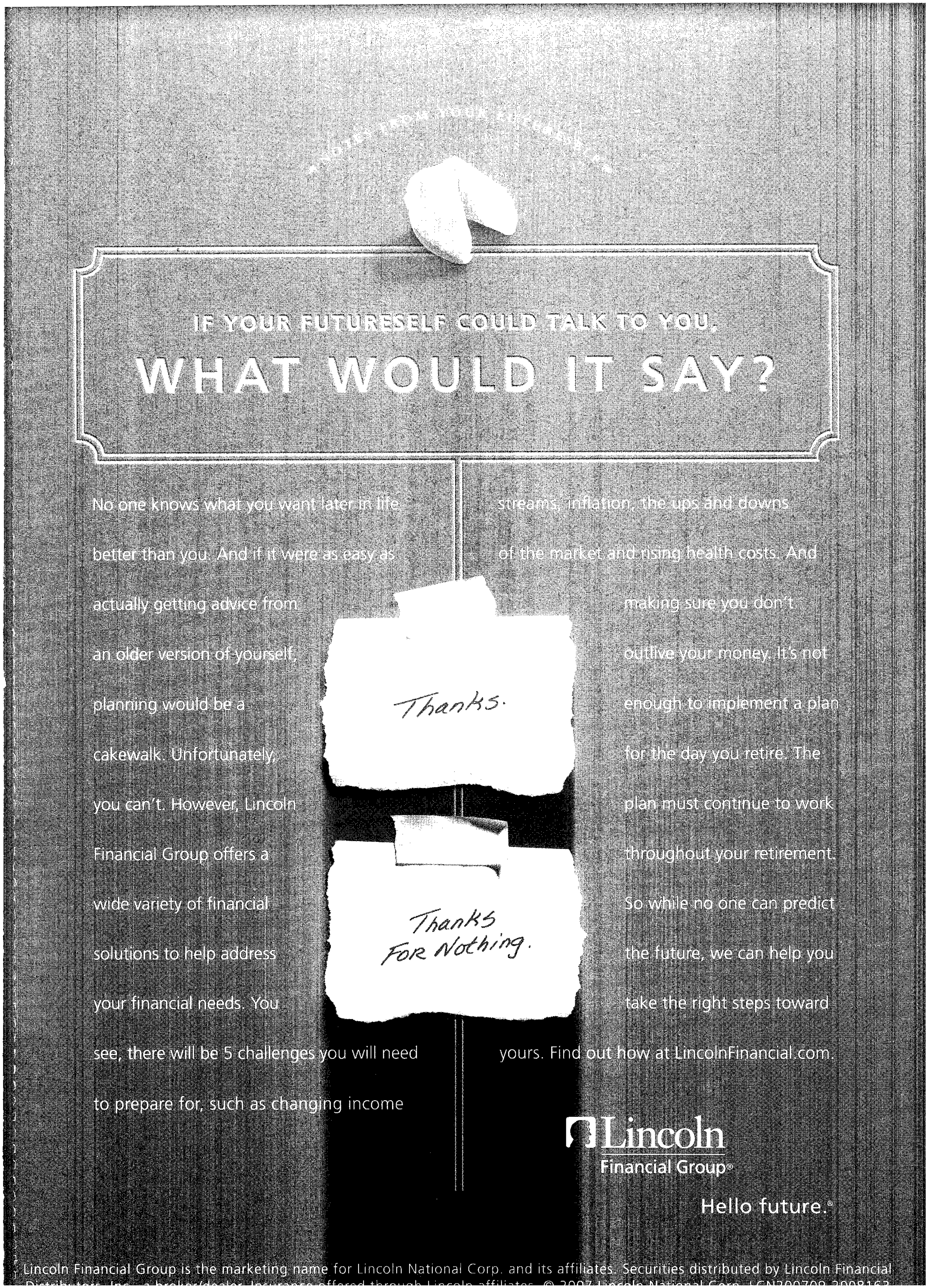
Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM RHYTHM & BLUES FESTIVAL AT METROTECH
MetroTech Commons, Flatbush Ave. at Myrtle Ave. (718-636-4100)—June 5: The Beninese guitarist **Lionel Loueke** employs an unorthodox, homegrown technique that draws on both jazz and African styles. With the vocalist **Somi,** who was born in Illinois and who has lived in Zambia, Kenya, and Tanzania. June 12: The Chicago soul veteran **Otis Clay** teaches the up-and-coming soul singer **Ryan Shaw** a thing or two about the business. The shows are at noon.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—June 4: **Horse the Band.** Not to be confused with the comparatively mellow indie-rock combo Band of Horses, this volatile California outfit produces a frenetic post-hardcore maelstrom. Not such serious fellows, they have been known to replicate the sounds of early Nintendo games and to release albums devoted to the subject of pizza. June 11: **James Hunter,** a blue-eyed-soul singer from Colchester, England, has a chiselled chin and an eager, polite stage manner.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—June 11: **Swervedriver** was often tagged with the "shoegazer" label (referring to early-nineties English bands with a droopy stage presence), even though the London band plays a brand of rock that is more propulsive than what's typically found in that genre. Swervedriver lasted from 1989 to 1999, but it has since re-formed, for a second stab at stardom. June 14: The seminal post-punk band **Mission of Burma,** which has already done the remarkable by getting back together with its dignity intact, revisits its back catalogue. Here they'll be performing their début EP, "Signals, Calls, and Marches," which features such anthems as "Academy Fight Song" and "That's When I Reach for My Revolver" (a song later covered by Moby). On June 15, they dedicate the night to their seismic 1982 album, "Vs." June 17: The **Futureheads,** from Sunderland, England, made a promising début in 2004 with a high-energy self-titled album that recalled the jagged guitars and jittery tempos of vintage post-punk acts like XTC and Gang of Four. Their second release, "News and Tributes," lacked the first record's immediacy and cost them their major-label deal. Their new record, "This Is Not the World," finds them fired up yet again.

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—June 12: **Isaac Hayes** kicks off the season with "Theme from 'Shaft' " and other twentieth-century soul classics. June 14: **Miriam Makeba,** the great South



IF YOUR FUTURESELF COULD TALK TO YOU,

WHAT WOULD IT SAY?

No one knows what you want later in life better than you. And if it were as easy as actually getting advice from an older version of yourself, planning would be a cakewalk. Unfortunately, you can't. However, Lincoln Financial Group offers a wide variety of financial solutions to help address your financial needs. You see, there will be 5 challenges you will need to prepare for, such as changing income streams, inflation, the ups and downs of the market and rising health costs. And making sure you don't outlive your money. It's not enough to implement a plan for the day you retire. The plan must continue to work throughout your retirement. So while no one can predict the future, we can help you take the right steps toward yours. Find out how at LincolnFinancial.com.

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Hello future.®

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17 across starts with "f." You can thank us later.
-your futureself

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Hello future.

The Crossword Challenge Series

Up for a new challenge? Here's one to get your Futureself dreaming—about books.

Lincoln Financial Group presents the second in a series of six individually themed crosswords appearing in the magazine through November 2008, that you can solve and mail in or enter online at www.futuresweeps.com.
Complete any of the crosswords correctly, and be entered to win a Nikon Coolpix S550 10.0 megapixel digital camera with 5x optical zoom and 2.5" LCD display (value: $229.95). One winner will be selected for each of the six crossword challenges.
Correctly complete any of the Lincoln Financial Group crosswords, and you'll also qualify to win the Grand Prize—an Undiscovered Italy™ premium villa vacation. (Complete *all six* puzzles correctly, and increase your chances of winning! One entry per challenge per household, please.)

Grand Prize includes roundtrip airfare for two, car rental, and a $2,000 credit toward an unforgettable luxury Parker Villas vacation in regions such as Tuscany, Umbria, Piedmont, Liguria, or Puglia (total value: $4,500).

To enter, mail in your solution by **midnight, July 2nd,** to:
The Lincoln Financial Group Crossword Challenge, c/o The New Yorker Promotion Department,
attn: "Futureself," 4 Times Square, 21st floor, New York, NY 10036, or enter online at www.futuresweeps.com.

Visit Web site for complete contest rules, and after July 7th for puzzle solution.

ACROSS

1. "__Bliss: Heavenly Ideas for Chilling Out"
4. "__ Hondo" (paperback sharing the name of Japanese temple)
7. "Buenos ___" = "Good morning" in "Imagining Spain: Historical Myth and National Identity"
11. Ancient Rome's bronze money
12. Business book subj.
13. "Do_ Otters: A Book About Manners"
14. "Rules for Renegades: How to _ _ Money, Rock Your Career, and Revel in Your Individuality": 2 wds.
16. "__Office Oddities: An Irreverent Collection of Presidential Facts, Follies, and Foibles"
17. Your best id yet to come!
19. "Killer_" (a Molly Forrester novel)
22. In baseball, goes to bat: 2 wds.
23. "The Thames: A Photographic Journey from Source to ___"
24. "'Tis nothing but a little downy owl" is a line from "The___" (a poem by Shelley in the upcoming bio)
26. Peach-like fruit...partially eaten here?
28. "_____Matisse" (from MoMA)
29. "The New___: Inside the Minds of the Truly Wealthy"
32. Ca$h dispen$er$, for $hort
34. Books such _ "__of Green Gables," celebrating 100th this year
35. Bristle-like plant bit
37. Start of Popeye's credo: 2 wds.
39. Drill instructors at boot camp, briefly

1	2	3	■	■	4	5	6	■	7	8	9	10
11			■	12				■	13			
14			15					■	16			
■	■	■	17					18				
19	20	21		■	22				■	23		
24				25		■	26		27		■	■
28					■	■	■	29			30	31
■	■	32			33	■	34					
35	36		■	37		38		■	39			
40			41					42		■	■	■
43				■	44					45	46	47
48				■	49				■	50		
51				■	52			■	■	53		

40. Sailing book, "___Ten Language Dictionary": 3rd edition
43. "Lake___Stories: Struggle and Survival on a Freshwater Ocean"
44. *Japanese marinating glaze*
48. Omani money
49. White-tailed sea eagle
50. Lass
51. Window ledge
52. "Oh, give ___home where the buffalo roam..."
53. Cinematic fare from "__of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity"

DOWN

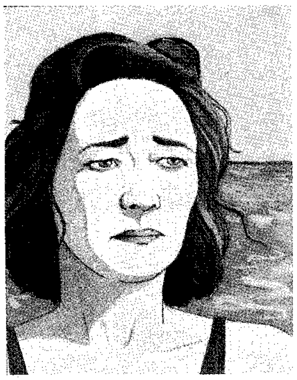
1. "__the Cooking Guy: Just a *Bunch of Recipes*"
2. Three-lettered soup
3. "Who Said So? The Questions Revolutionary Businesses __ That Make Them Successful"
4. "Frommer's Nova__, New Brunswick & Prince Edward Island"
5. Falcon-headed Egyptian god
6. Lowest winning margin in baseball: 2 wds.
7. Pairs
8. Personal-finance book from Bloomberg Press, "__ 101"
9. "Johnny One-Eye: ___ of the American Revolution" is set on 18th-c. Manhattan Island
10. Singer's syllable-singing
12. Ostrich-like outback bird
15. "Success Is a Team ___"
18. Olympic fencers' swords
19. Sports spectator's cheer
20. Suffix with "capital" (profit)
21. "How to Understand the__Pages: A Guide to...the Jargon"
25. "No__: The Texas Hold 'Em Guide to Winning in Business"
27. "Sassy,__, and Still Sparkling: Celebrating Life After 50"
30. "____: It Rocks the Earth" (published again this year)
31. Wide shoe-width sizes
33. "A Trader's Money Management ____: How to Ensure Profit and Avoid the Risk of Ruin"
34. Nile excavation site
35. Landmark in Australia, __Rock
36. "The Great Plains during World__"
38. "It's___formality."
41. Setting of Dante's "Inferno"
42. Never, in German
45. Iron, Bronze, or Stone
46. Round Table knight
47. Soho Press mystery, "Murder on the _ Saint-Louis"

THE LINCOLN FINANCIAL GROUP CROSSWORD CHALLENGE RULES AND REGULATIONS
NO PURCHASE NECESSARY.

1. This challenge starts June 2, 2008, 12:01 A.M. ET, and ends 12:00 A.M. ET, July 2, 2008. Each individual crossword challenge will last a month from issue newsstand date.
2. Contestants may enter the contest by correctly completing and submitting the Lincoln Financial Group crossword via mail, or by submitting a photocopy thereof found in the June 9, 2008, issue of *The New Yorker*. Contestants must include name, address, telephone, and e-mail in the envelope addressed to *The New Yorker* Promotion Department, attn: "Futureself," 4 Times Square, *New York, NY 10036. Contestants may also enter online at www.futuresweeps.com.*
3. Prize description as noted above or visit www.futuresweeps.com for more information.
4. *One camera will be given away for each of the six crossword challenges.*
5. This sweepstakes (the "Promotion") is only open to legal residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia who are at least 18 years old as of the date of entry, except officers, directors, members, and employees of the Sponsor, the judging organization (if applicable), or any other party associated with the development or administration of this Promotion, and their immediate family (i.e., parents, children, siblings, spouse), and persons residing in the same household as such individuals. Lincoln Financial Group affiliates and their respective employees/representatives are not eligible to win prizes from this sweepstakes. This Promotion is void outside the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, and where prohibited.
6. One entry per person per household for each of the six Lincoln Financial Group Crossword challenges.
7. For complete contest rules, visit www.futuresweeps.com, and again after July 7th for puzzle solution.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MADE IN THE SHADE

"Celebrating Summer," the title of a film series running at MOMA through June 26, sounds happy and glorious, until you start checking the fine print. Just when you thought it was safe to go out in the sunshine, movies like "Bonjour Tristesse," "The Night of



LARA TOMLIN

the Shooting Stars," and "Jaws" are designed to drag you back under the shadows of threat, and even the milder masterpieces on offer, such as "Smiles of a Summer Night" and "A Day in the Country," seem overcast with wistfulness by the end. Nowhere do terror and tenderness mix to more startling effect than in "Under the Sand" (2000), still the best film from the French director François Ozon. Charlotte Rampling, as formidable as ever, plays Marie, whose husband vanishes during a day at the beach, just after having lovingly oiled her back. Even after viewing a body, she refuses to accept his disappearance, and the needs of her own body remain unquenched. Shot and edited with extraordinary bite, the story coolly surveys the heat of our desires and other unlikely aftermaths of grief.

—Anthony Lane

African singer and anti-apartheid activist is on a farewell tour. But before she retires, she's stopping here to celebrate Nelson Mandela's ninetieth birthday. With the bassist **Bakithi Kumalo**, a native of Soweto Township and a key member of Paul Simon's "Graceland" band, and others.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—June 13: For half a century, **Mavis Staples** has been delivering a potent blend of gospel, blues, soul, and social commentary. As the lead voice in the family band led by her father, Pops, Staples scored hits with "I'll Take You There" and "Respect Yourself," among others. Last year, she recorded "We'll Never Turn Back," an album that concentrated on songs of the civil-rights movement. With the young Bronx-born soul singer **Stephanie McKay**. June 14: The celebrated band of Columbia grads in **Vampire Weekend** make toe-tapping rock with Afro-pop flourishes. June 15: An afternoon of salsa with **Victor Manuelle.**

"GOVERNORS ISLAND CONCERT SERIES"
The folks behind the Highline Ballroom have commandeered this more or less neglected former Coast Guard base and Civil War prison for a summer concert series. The rollicking and enterprising jam band **moe.** starts things off on June 15. (For more information, visit www.govislandconcerts.com.)

GRAND BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—June 16: The ethereal Icelandic quartet **Sigur Rós.**

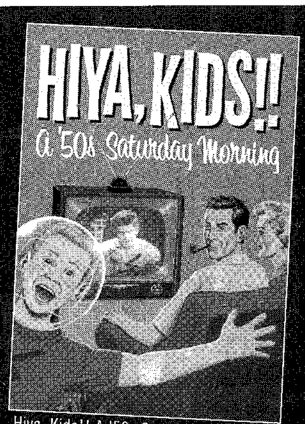
HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—June 7: Seattle's **Mudhoney** never achieved the global dominance of their grunge-rock peers Soundgarden, Nirvana, and Pearl Jam, but their endearingly rough-around-the-edges bluster continues to pack a wallop two decades on. **Donita Sparks and the Stellar Moments** open the show. Sparks, also a grunge veteran (though one with punk attitude), once led L.A.'s all-female band L7 in its guitar-driven quest to reach the hearts of the flannel-clad set. L7 hasn't been heard from in years, but Sparks, who is also an activist, has continued to rock. Her new band has a début album, "Transmiticate," and a broader but still forceful sound.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—June 7: The reggaetón kingpins **Wisin & Yandel.** June 12: **Jimmy Buffett** and the **Coral Reefer Band.** The feel-good rocker recently performed for that other Buffett, the one from Omaha who happens to be the richest man on the planet. It's not such an odd gig for Jimmy; singing about cheeseburgers and margaritas (as well as producing movies, opening restaurants, and writing novels) has made him tens of millions of dollars.

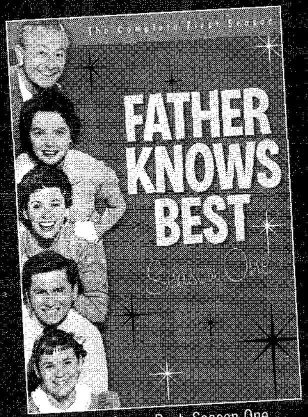
NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—June 4: A night of independent hip-hop with **Rakim, GZA, Blackalicious,** and many others.

WAMU THEATRE AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—June 10-11: **Robert Plant** and **Alison Krauss.** Three decades ago, with Led Zeppelin, Plant took American blues to stratospheric heights. More recently, Krauss has been reinvigorating bluegrass and other traditional folk forms. **T Bone Burnett,** who is perhaps best known for producing the "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" juggernaut, opens with his own music and will lead the band backing the headlining duo.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—June 10: An experimental side project for the Pixies bassist, Kim Deal, and the Throwing Muses guitarist Tanya Donnelly that came together in the late eighties, the **Breeders** went on to become one of the more hotly touted bands of the nineties. Donnelly left the band early in that decade and was replaced by Deal's twin sister, Kelley. The Breeders' 1993 album, "Last Splash," featured the instant hit "Cannonball," but their stardom was short-lived; they soon dissolved in a folly of attrition, inertia, and drug abuse. It took nine years



Hiya, Kids!! A '50s Saturday Morning
Itemcode: 89123



Father Knows Best: Season One
Itemcode: 89311

Innocence Found: The Sweet, Simple Pleasures of '50s TV Now on DVD

Life was simpler and TV was a little golden god. Welcome to the '50s: an Internet-/video game-/iPod-free realm where television time was family time. We took the liberty of relocating a slice of that lost innocence, courtesy of two deluxe 4-DVD box sets: Season One of the classic *Father Knows Best* and *Hiya, Kids!! A '50s Saturday Morning*, featuring 21 classic children's programs, including *Howdy Doody, Flash Gordon, Kukla, Fran And Ollie, Lassie, The Cisco Kid*, and more. Pop 'em in, recline, rewind . . .

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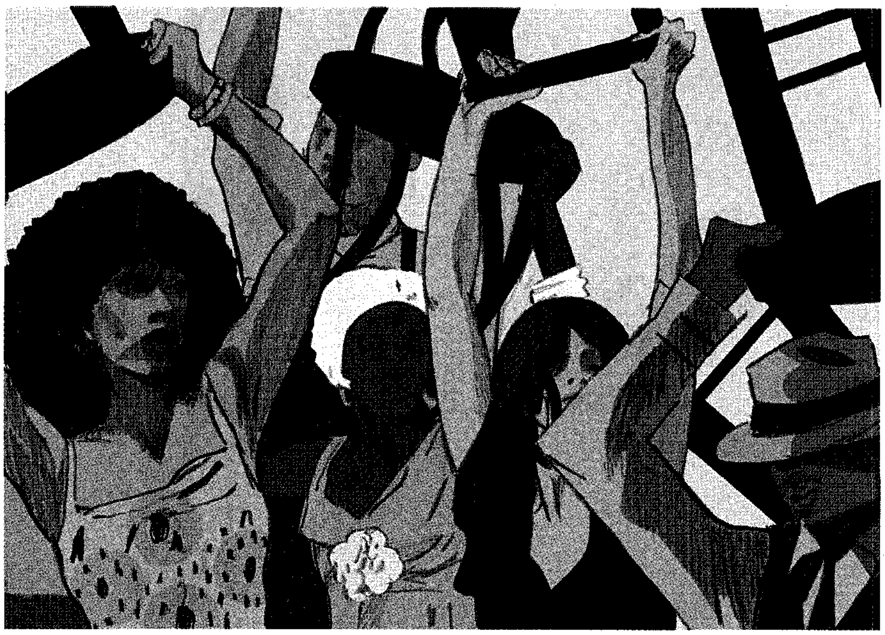
for the band to issue a followup album, "Title TK," which did little to recapture the magic of those early years. Undeterred, the Breeders have put together another album, "Mountain Battles."

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

June 5: The noted Iranian vocalist **Mohammad Reza Shajarian,** a master of Persian classical singing. With his son **Homayoun Shajarian.** (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St.) June 7: A night of stellar samba with **Berço do Samba de São Mateus,** direct from Brazil. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre performs "Masekela Langage," at BAM.

RACHEL DOMM

THE ZIPPER FACTORY THEATRE

336 W. 37th St. (212-352-3101)—June 12: **Novice Theory** is the local singer-songwriter Geo Wyeth, a twenty-three-year-old Yale grad, female-to-male transgendered person, and autodidact accordionist (who learned the instrument by "watching that Russian Jewish dude on the Q platform in Union Square play a toy accordion"). Wyeth, who also can handle with ease the piano (he was classically trained), bass, guitar, and other instruments, has been drawing notice at Joe's Pub and other cabarets around town for his strongly narrative songs and evocative performances.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—June 3-8: The vocalist **Keely Smith.** June 10-14: For the past few years, before Michael Brecker's death, in January of last year, Brecker, **Joe Lovano,** and **Dave Liebman** rode into town periodically to show just what could be done with a saxophone. They also recorded an album together, "Saxophone Summit: Gathering of Spirits," in 2004. After Brecker's death, the estimable **Ravi Coltrane** joined Lovano and Liebman to form a triumvirate of masterful post-bop players. They celebrate here with a new album, "Saxophone Summit: Seraphic Light," a tribute to Brecker.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—June 5-8: **Rachelle Ferrell,** an agile vocalist with jazz training and R. & B. experience. June 9: **Cassandra Wilson** celebrates the release of "Loverly," her new album of standards. June 10-15: The virtuosic Cuban pianist **Omar Sosa** and his sextet. Late night on June 13: The **Hypnotic Brass Ensemble** is a group of eight brothers (plus a drummer), originally from Chicago, who write their own jazz- and New Orleans-influenced songs. They're often found busking on the streets of Manhattan, but they come from a lineage that should make them a club staple soon enough; all but the drummer are all sons of Phil Cohran, a former trumpeter for the Sun Ra Arkestra.

CAFÉ CARLYLE

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—June 4-July 5: **Eartha Kitt.** There's plenty of purr left in the original Catwoman. She's in her eighties, but she's still funny, steamy, and multilingual.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—June 3-8: The tenor saxophonist **Frank Wess** made his name with the mighty Count Basie band. Here he provides himself with the next best thing: a well-fortified, all-star nonet featuring five additional horns, including the altoist **Ted Nash,** the trumpeter **Terell Stafford,** and the trombonist **Steve Turre.** As the octogenarian Wess demonstrated not long ago at the Village Vanguard, he remains a model of bluesy elegance.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—June 5-8: Max Roach, the magisterial drummer and bandleader who died last year, is celebrated by a host of musicians, many of whom played with him. The saxophonists **Odean Pope** and **James Carter** will be joined throughout the run by, among others, **Charles Tolliver, Billy Harper, Cecil Bridgewater, Christian McBride,** and **Jimmy Cobb.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—June 4-8: The trumpeter **Nicholas Payton** swings by with the driving quintet he used to record his new album, "Into the Blue." June 12-15: The veteran jazz vocalist **Freddy Cole.**

JVC JAZZ FESTIVAL

Rolling into town with its signature mix of jazz and pop, this annual gathering gets under way with shows by the pianist **Kenny Barron,** in a Father's Day appearance at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, in Harlem (515 Malcolm X Blvd. June 15), and a tribute to the late Alice Coltrane, featuring **Ravi Coltrane, Geri Allen, Charlie Haden, Jack DeJohnette,** and others (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St., at Central Park W. June 17). The festival continues through June 28 with Herbie Hancock, Jill Scott, Hank Jones, Al Green, Cecil Taylor, Diane Reeves, Mos Def, Dick Hyman, and the Bad Plus all headlining shows. (For more information, visit www.festivalnetwork.com.)

NEW LANGUAGES FESTIVAL

June 12-14: This gathering of outside-the-box players returns for its fourth year. The free-thinking bandleaders include the saxophonists **Chris Speed, Tony Malaby,** and **Jackson Moore,** the guitarist **Ty Cumbie,** and the drummer **Tyshawn Sorey.** (The Living Theatre, 21 Clinton St. For a full schedule, visit www.newlanguages.org.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—June 3-8: The pianist **Eric Reed** leads a crack neo-hard-bop unit featuring the trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt** and the saxophonist **Stacy Dillard.** June 10-15: The Argentinean composer and pianist **Guillermo Klein** caused a stir among the jazz cognoscenti during the late nineties with Los Guachos, a large ensemble stocked with fresh new-jazz players. For this run, he's reassembled the outfit with some of its star soloists, including the saxophonists **Chris Cheek** and **Bill McHenry** and the guitarist **Ben Monder.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

VISION FESTIVAL

June 10-15: Thirteen years after its valiant beginnings, this annual gathering of free-jazz devotees continues to champion the genre in all its multifarious forms. Highlights include the trumpeter **Dave Douglas** (June 10); a night devoted to the life and work of **Edward (Kidd) Jordan,** featuring the New Orleans saxophonist in a number of different configurations (June 11); **Oliver Lake's New Quintet Project** (June 12); a duet with **Sonny Simmons** and **Bobby Few,** as well as **Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quintet** (June 13); the **Matthew Shipp Trio** (June 14); and **William Parker's Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield,** a group that includes the poet **Amiri Baraka** (June 15). (Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk St., at Rivington St. For details, visit www.visionfestival.org.)

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Medieval and Renaissance Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Tiepolo Drawings from the Robert Lehman Collection."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Photography on Photography: Reflections on the Medium Since 1960."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ **"Radiance from the Rain Forest: Featherwork in Ancient Peru."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Anatomy of a Masterpiece: How to Read Chinese Paintings."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson."** Through June 30. ♦ **"Glossolalia: Languages of Drawing."** Through July 7. ♦ **"Projects 87: Sigalit Landau."** Through July 28. ♦ **"Geometry of Motion 1920s/1970s."** Through June 23. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"A Year with Children 2008."** The museum has installed its annual exhibition of works created by students in its Learning Through Art program, which sends artists into the city's public elementary schools. Through June 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

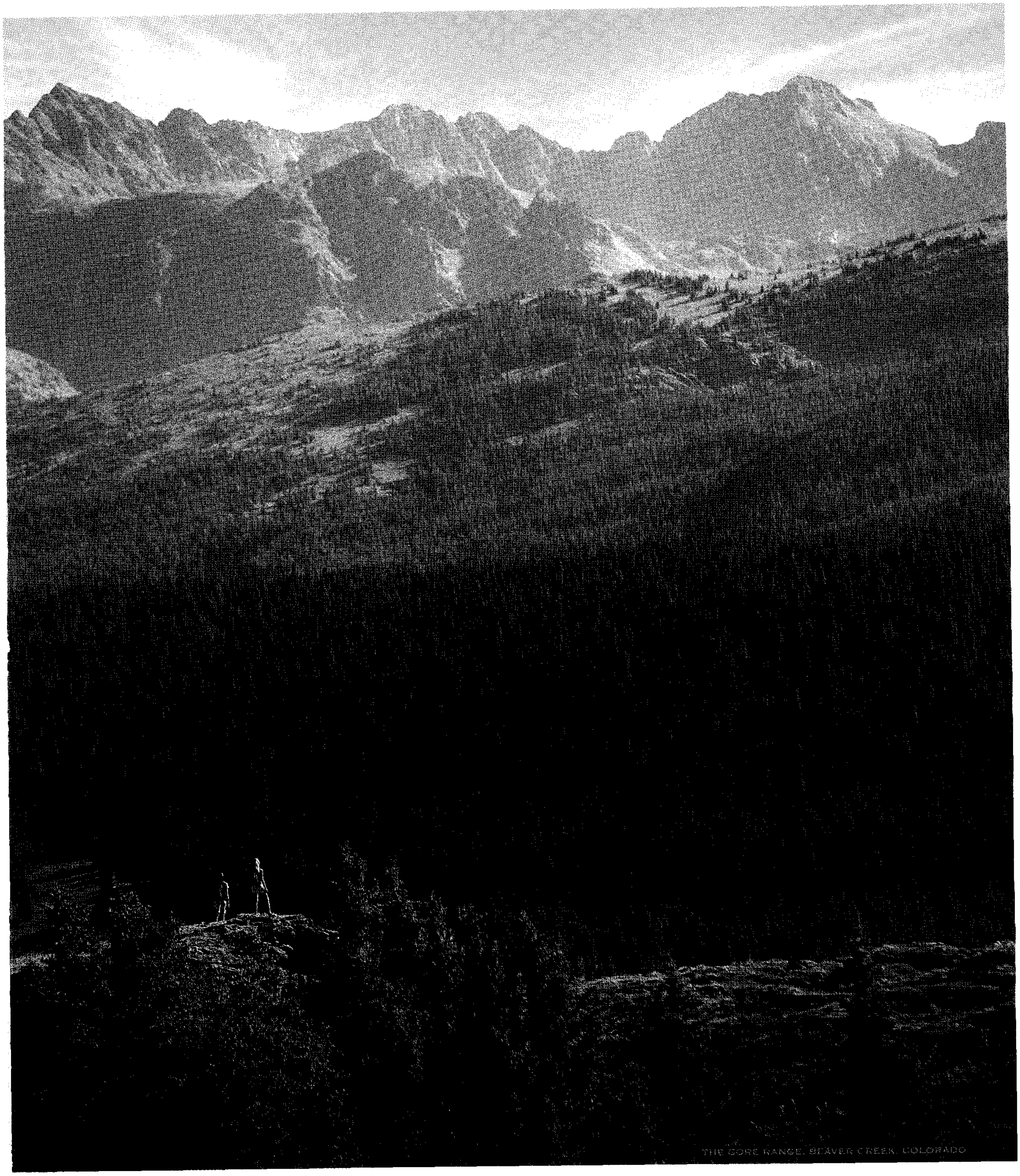
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Polaroids: Mapplethorpe."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"© Murakami."** Through July 13. ♦ **"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

I'VE A FEELING WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE.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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4, 2009. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"How Soon Is Now?"** Borrowing its title from a song by the Smiths, the museum exhibits works by the thirty-six participants in the twenty-eighth annual Artist in the Marketplace program. Through Aug. 18. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan."** Opens May 16. ♦ **"Bill Wood's Business."** Opens May 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"Genius of Japanese Lacquer: Masterworks by Shibata Zeshin."** Through June 15. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Philip Guston: Works on Paper."** Through Aug. 31. ♦ **"Illuminating the Medieval Hunt."** Through Aug. 10. ♦ On June 17 at 6:30, the painter Carroll Dunham discusses Philip Guston's drawings with Robert Storr, the dean of the Yale School of Art. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"The 183rd Annual."** This year's invitational showcases a hundred and thirty artists, from the established (the painter David Reed, the ceramicist Betty Woodman) to the up-and-coming (the collagist Chambliss Giobbi, the painter Danielle Tegeder). Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Paul Chan: The 7 ~~Lights~~."** Through June 29. ♦ **"Tomma Abts."** Through June 29. ♦ **"Double Album: Daniel Guzmán and Steven Shearer."** Through July 6. ♦ **"SANAA: Works 1998-2008."** Through June 15. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN
Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx (718-817-8700)—**"Moore in America."** The British sculptor Henry Moore (1898-1986) wrote, "I find that all natural forms are a source of unending interest—tree trunks, the texture and variety of grasses . . ." Through autumn, visitors can contemplate twenty of the artist's monumental sculptures—the largest gathering ever in the U.S.—amid the garden's two hundred and fifty acres. Through Nov. 2. ♦ **"Darwin's Garden: An Evolutionary Adventure."** Through July 20. ♦ This year, in the conservatory, the annual Spring Flower Show re-creates Darwin's garden at Down House, his home outside London. Through June 15.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Plague in Gotham!: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century New York."** Through Nov. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson."** Through June 30. ♦ **"Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland."** Through Sept. 15. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s."** Through July 28. ♦ **"Michael Portnoy: Casino Ilinx."** Through July 28. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JOSEF ALBERS / DAN FLAVIN
Playing an astute game of "separated at birth," this show pairs oil-on-Masonite paintings by Albers and neon sculptures by Flavin. In the process, it reveals more common interests than one might think to attribute to the sober modernist of Black Mountain College and the Conceptualist of Canal Street supplies. The latter's untitled monuments (in examples dating from 1964 through 1994) and the former's "Homages to the Square" (the paintings here were made between 1937 and 1971) share refulgent color, optical flicker, and compositions based on deliberately workmanlike right angles that nevertheless imply a transcendence of mere human constructions and an absorption into realms of pulsing light. Through June 14. (Gering & Lopez, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 646-336-7183.)

TOMOKO SAWADA
Like Cindy Sherman and Nikki Lee, Sawada uses photography to explore identity and female roles, but she doesn't stray far from teen-age Japanese stereotypes. For her latest series, she dressed up in super-girly, head-to-toe designer outfits, most frilly, pastel, and more suited to the playpen than the urban street. Sawada appears twice in each image, playing her own best friend in a complementary ensemble, a variety of hair colors and styles providing only minimal disguise. The accessories—plush white Teddy bears, lace-trimmed umbrellas—are baby-doll femme, but there's a smug, provocative edge to these fashion photographs that cuts their saccharine content. Through June 27. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223.)

Short List

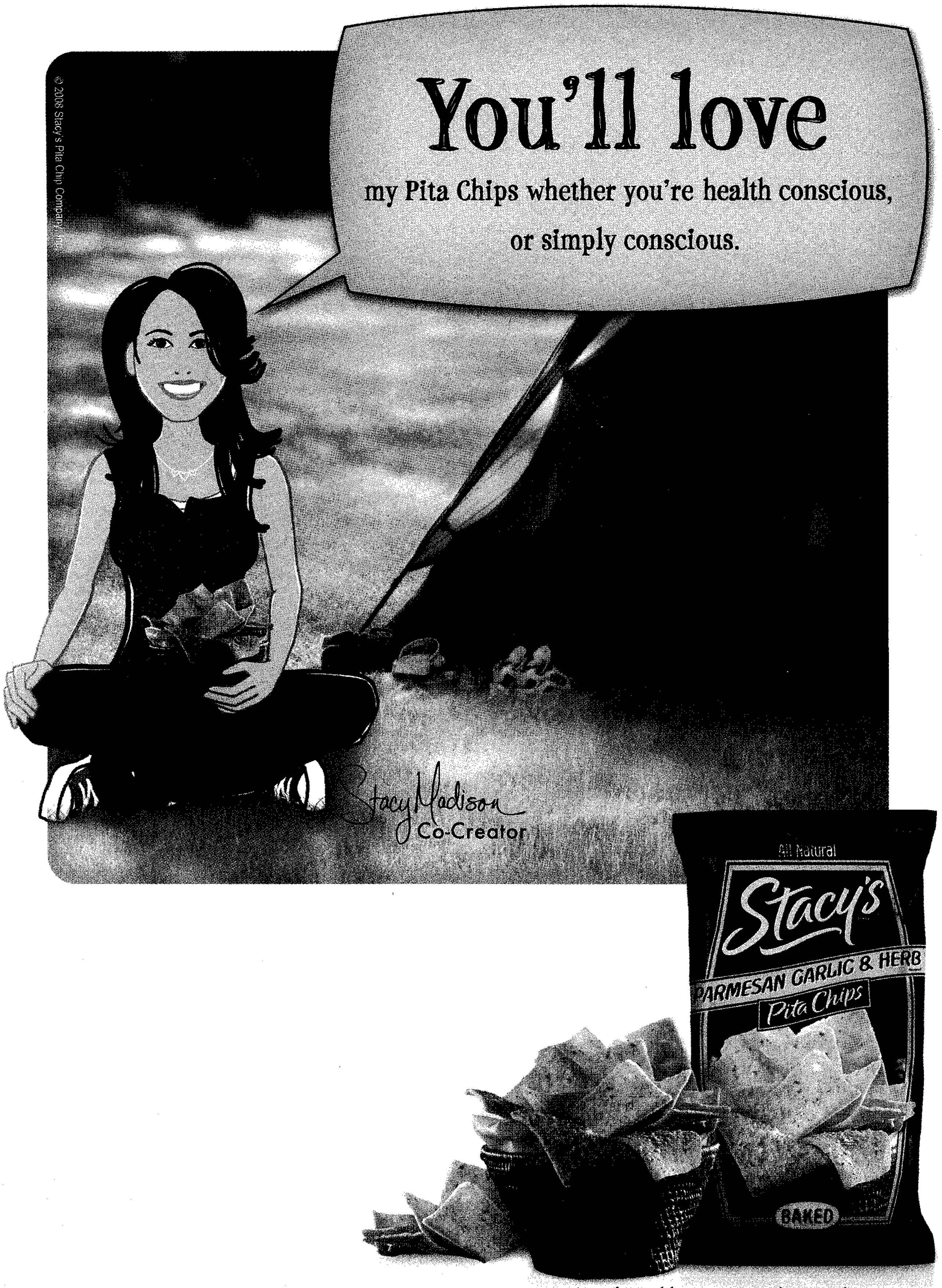
RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through June 27. **SAUL LEITER:** Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through June 21. **GABRIEL OROZCO:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through June 14.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

LEE BUL
This Korean artist's work often has a switchblade toughness, dark in tone and conceptually sharp. Here, shallow cases lined with two-way mirrors display what look like assault-rifle/guillotine hybrids, to vague but menacing effect. A large, chain-bedecked chandelier, an homage to the architect Bruno Taut, shares a mirror-floored room with the show's centerpiece, a black "bunker" fitted with an elaborate audio system. Step inside, put on the headphones, and the gallery beyond is obliterated by amplified ambient noise; a footfall, a whisper, even a breath can sound both loud and echoingly distant. Through June 14. (Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

SAINT CLAIR CEMIN
In the Brazilian-born sculptor's new show, a coppery octopus wrangles with Monopoly houses; a pink cello's fleshy, Gustonesque contours are topped by a neck straight out of Brancusi; and a limp, ghostly figure is linked to a brick structure by a thin string. These works, and their half-dozen roommates, are humorous, well crafted, and dense with references—yet the show still disappoints. A self-serious tone makes the jokes fall flat, and, more frustrating, there's a failure to see themes or ideas through. Through June 7. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

NEO RAUCH
In the latest show, the Leipzig painter offers the expected: drab colors, convoluted historical narratives, nineteenth-century bohemian costumes,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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TO PLAY THE KING

In a recent Carnegie Hall concert, the awesomely gifted German bass René Pape teased the audience with seven minutes of Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov"—an opera in which he sang last year in Berlin but has yet to tackle on this side of the Atlantic.

GRANT SHAFFER

With the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra under Valery Gergiev, he delivered Boris's Act II monologue, wherein the tsar declares that he has achieved supreme power, but remains tormented by his murderous past. Pape's voice remains one of the most remarkable in opera: it is anchored on low notes of rocklike solidity and blazes brilliantly as it goes above middle C. These are qualities that make for a great Boris, and also for a great Wotan—a role that Pape plans to undertake in a couple years' time. (He'll sing the Wagnerian roles of Fasolt, Hunding, and King Marke at the Met next season.) Yet the singer didn't quite convey the tsar's vulnerability, his inner terror. The next test for Pape is to use the power of his voice to convey the loss of power, the helplessness of being human.

—*Alex Ross*

Surrealism mixed with social realism, and a few passages of flattened-out abstraction. What can be gleaned, then, from this predictably Rauchian suite of neo-figurative history canvases? That painting is infinitely recyclable; history is hallucinogenic; and the lessons of modernism, with its starry-eyed utopian ideas and aesthetics, don't really apply to the present. The other unavoidable message is that it's hard being German, a line trotted out by Beuys, Kiefer, Kippenberger, and others. Somehow, in Rauch's fourth show at the gallery, this sentiment, even delivered by a denizen of the former Eastern Bloc, feels a bit stale. Through June 21. (Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

CLIFFORD ROSS

Ross uses the huge, panoramic photographs of Colorado's Mount Sopris from his previous show as the jumping-off point for elaborately abstracted versions of the same serene vista. If the original image of a mountain reflected in a glassy lake was at once inflated and generic, beautiful and banal, these new reworkings are bizarre, manic, and oddly entertaining. Ross has isolated squares of foliage from the lakeside woods, tinted them unnatural monochromes, and scattered them across the landscape like a collapsing house of cards. At its most extreme, this process disintegrates the original photograph, and Ross's computer-driven tour de force hits a spectacular dead end. Through June 21. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018.)

Short List

MATTHEW BRANNON: Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through July 11. **MARK DI SUVERO:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through June 27. **WALTON FORD:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Through July 3. **LIAM GILLICK:** Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335. Through June 14. **ANISH KAPOOR:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through June 21; 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Through Aug. 15. **KERRY JAMES MARSHALL:** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701. Through July 3. **DAVID SHRIGLEY:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through June 21. **LAURIE SIMMONS:** Nitsch, 534 W. 22nd St. 212-645-2030 Through June 28. **ROBERT THERRIEN:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 14. **CHRISTOPHER WOOL:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through June 21. **"WHO'S AFRAID OF JASPER JOHNS?":** Shafrazi, 544 W. 26th St. 212-274-9300. Through July 12.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JOHN BALDESSARI/MATT MULLICAN

A joint project between a teacher (Baldessari) and his former student (Mullican) takes the form of a volley between objects. (The show's title, "Pong," is borrowed from Atari's early video-game version of table tennis.) Baldessari got the ball rolling by e-mailing Mullican a group of found photographs. Mullican responded by transforming one of the pictures into a scrapbook. Images evolved into a volley of words: Baldessari wrote a limerick and Mullican set off to find the words online; the results are presented here as a slide show. As in any game, the joy comes from watching the challengers construct and defuse each other's snares. Through June 28. (Williams, 513 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757.)

LEE FRIEDLANDER

Friedlander is notorious for overhanging his gallery shows (there are ninety-three photographs in this one), but jarring juxtapositions and visual overload definitely suit his work. The black-and-white portraits here, most made since 2000, are of his family and friends—Richard Avedon, Ornette Coleman, and John Szarkowski, among them. Friedlander doesn't flatter his subjects; he catches them hunched over, mouths gaping, sweat-stained, and ill at ease in cluttered rooms. But, under his gaze, this awkwardness appears more than just endearingly human—it's a badge of honor. Through June 14. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

RYAN JOHNSON

Nowadays we'd call his subjects security guards, but for his first solo show in New York, Johnson resurrects the more romantic-sounding title of "Watchman." Represented in quasi-abstract figurative form and fabricated from the same type of casting tape used for wrapping broken bones, his watchmen look like Giacometti-Kienholz hybrids. One foot of each figure is lodged in a bucket of concrete; their faces, made of clocks with multiple hands, underscore the theme of convoluted time. Magic Markers chained to the sculptures allow viewers to scrawl their own messages on them. Unfortunately, the vapid tone of the comments lends the gesture an air of shtick. Through June 14. (Guild & Greyshkul, 28 Wooster St. 212-625-9224.)

JOSE PICAYO

Picayo has taken the cold, unvarying format of the mug shot and warmed it up. Papering this small gallery with more than eight hundred of his own unframed photographs, he surrounds the viewer with walls of faces: men, women, and children of all ages, races, and types. You may recognize a few famous mugs (Martha Stewart, the artist Duane Michals), but the air of anonymity is what makes the show feel so much like New York—compressed but irrepressible. The format, which typically raises questions about assumed guilt or innocence, here suggests that everyone pictured is indeed wanted—in the best sense of the word. Through June 22. (Rice, 325 W. 11th St. 212-366-6660.)

"A.I.R. GALLERY RETROSPECTIVE"

New York's first women's coöperative gallery is commemorated with a show of works made between 1972 and 1979 by such early exhibitors as Nancy Spero, Howardena Pindell, Sylvia Sleigh, Agnes Denes, and Ana Mendieta. Most of what's here is modest in size, scale, and—within the scope of many of the artists' careers—ambition. Nonetheless, the show honors the gallery's original aim, which was not just to present works by women but also to embrace nontraditional approaches. Pat Lasch's wedding-cake-like tower, Nancy Kitchel's sound installation with speakers crammed into leather boots, and Anne Healy's puffs of watercolor-tinted chiffon clinging to the wall offer convincing evidence. Through June 14. (Werkstätte, 55 Great Jones St. 212-228-2996.)

Short List

ELLEN CANTOR: Participant, 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through July 6. **STEVE DIBENEDETTO:** Nolan, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-925-6190. Through June 21. **DARA FRIEDMAN:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through June 28. **YOLA MONAKHOV:** Wolf, 10 Leonard St. 212-925-0025. Through June 21. **"NEW YORK COOL":** Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780. Through July 19.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

"Dances at a Gathering" (1969), by Jerome Robbins, is a suite of dances set to Chopin waltzes, mazurkas, and études for the piano that feels organic, fully formed, and suffused with the grounded emotion that characterizes his best work; it is perhaps his greatest ballet. Sharing the program is "Other Dances," a shorter pas de deux in a similar vein, also set to Chopin, and made for Mikhail Baryshnikov and Natalia Makarova seven years later. But Robbins had other modes, too: "Glass Pieces," from 1983, was his exploration of minimalism. ♦ June 3 at 7:30 and June 12 at 8: "Rococo Variations," "River of Light," "Oltremare," and "Concerto DSCH." ♦ June 4 at 7:30 and June 6 at 8: "Dances at a Gathering," "Other Dances," and "The Concert." ♦ June 5 at 8: "Brandenburg," "In the

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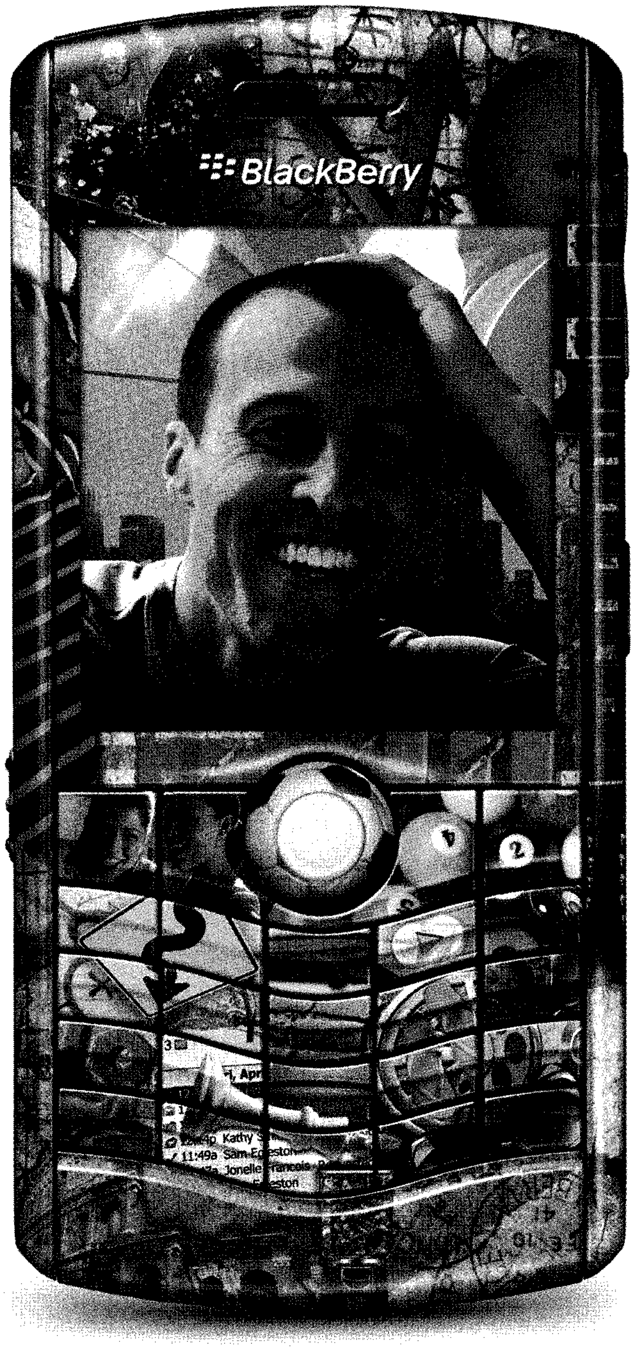

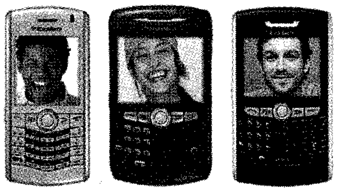

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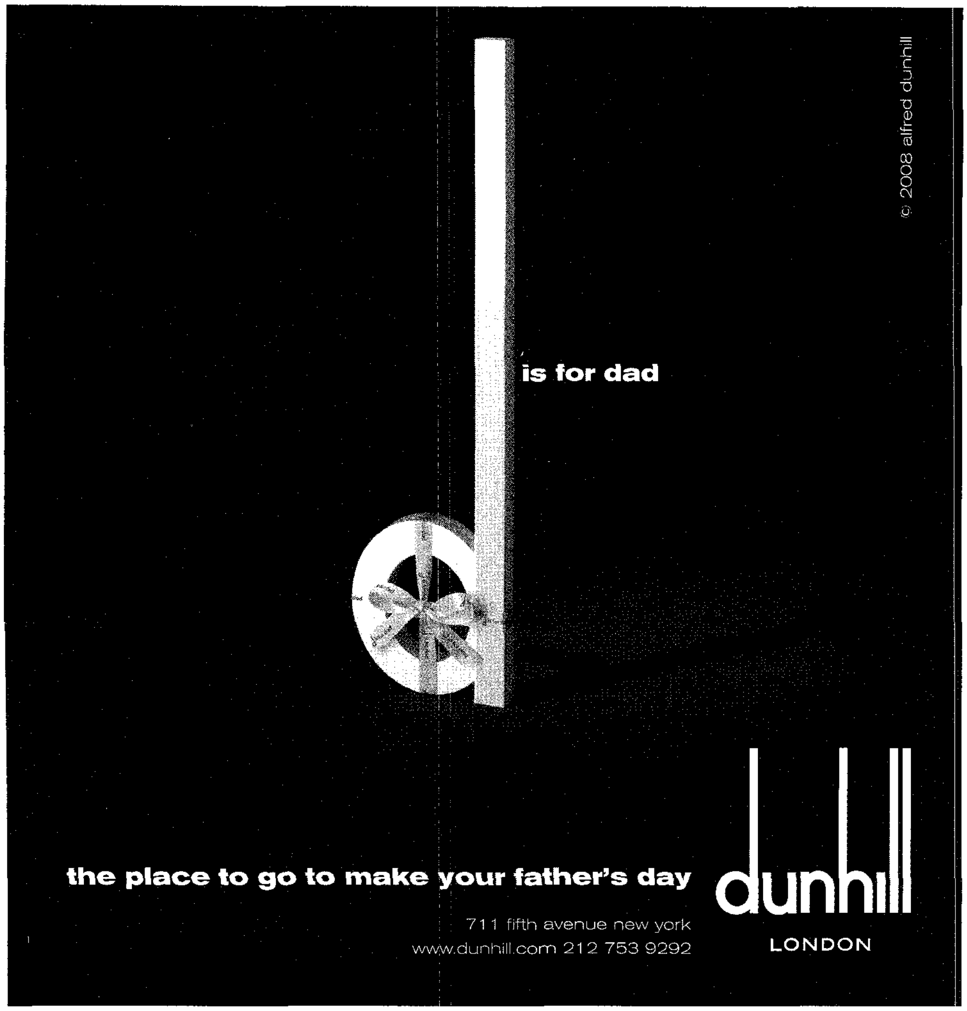
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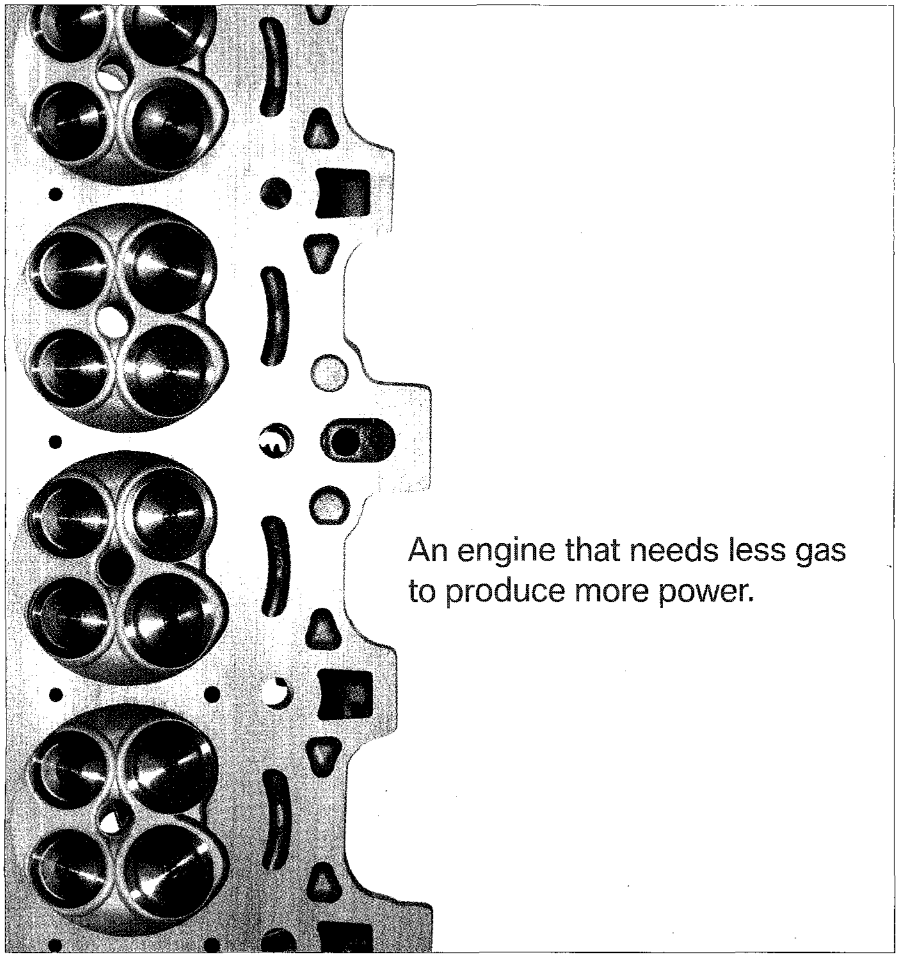

Night," and "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz." ♦ June 7 at 2 and 8: "Jewels." ♦ June 8 at 3 and June 13 at 8: "Thou Swell," "Prodigal Son," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ June 10-11 at 7:30 and June 15 at 3: "Circus Polka," "Moves," "The Cage," "Four Bagatelles," and "Fanfare." ♦ June 14 at 2 and 8 and June 17 at 7:30: "2 & 3 Part Inventions," "A Suite of Dances," "In Memory of . . .," and "Glass Pieces." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 29.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

The title of Twyla Tharp's new dance "Rabbit and Rogue" slyly suggests the contrasting movement styles of its two leads, Herman Cornejo and Ethan Stiefel: one is nimble, the other fierce. The score, by the film composer Danny Elfman, is also filled with sharp contrasts, from jazzy to sinuously lyrical to heroic. This is a big season for Cornejo, and it's high time, too; the understated virtuoso will finally dance the lead in several story ballets, beginning with the technically dazzling "Don Quixote" (at the June 11 matinée, with Xiomara Reyes as Kitri). Casts, which appear on the company's Web site, are subject to change. ♦ June 3 and June 5-6 at 8 and June 4 and June 7 at 2 and 8: "Rabbit and Rogue" and "Études." ♦ June 9-10 and June 12-13 at 8 and June 11 and June 14 at 2 and 8: "Don Quixote." ♦ June 16-17 at 8: "The Sleeping Beauty." (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through July 12.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

One of the most popular dance companies in the country turns fifty; for New Yorkers, the party starts in Brooklyn, as the troupe returns to BAM for the first time in thirty-eight years. The two touring programs are "Classic Ailey," with a welcome revival of "Masekela Langage" (1969), plus "Night Creature" and "Revelations"; and "Best Of," which includes a recent misfire ("The Groove to Nobody's Business"), a canny import (Twyla Tharp's "Golden Section"), and "Revelations." (Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. "Classic Ailey": June 3 and June 6 at 7:30 and June 8 at 3 and 7:30. "Best Of": June 4-5 at 7:30 and June 7 at 2 and 7:30.)

MOMIX

Moses Pendleton's company concludes its annual run, with "Lunar Sea." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. June 3-4 at 7:30, June 5-6 at 8, June 7 at 2 and 8, and June 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

RIOULT

The company of the consistent craftsman Pascal Rioult presents "Views of the Fleeting World," "Prelude to Night," and "Bolero." (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. June 3 at 7:30 and June 5-7 at 8.)

CEDAR LAKE CONTEMPORARY BALLET

The well-funded company offers the U.S. première of Jo Strømgren's "Sunday, Again," a badminton-themed dance for eight couples set to Bach's "Jesu, Meine Freude"; a new staging of Angelin Preljocaj's duet "L'Annonciation"; and Nicolo Fonte's ensemble piece "Lasting Imprint," set to Steve Reich's "Triple Quartet." (547 W. 26th St. 212-868-4444. June 3-6, June 8-13, and June 15 at 8 and June 7 and June 14 at 2 and 8.)

MICHAEL CLARK COMPANY

When Clark's completed "Stravinsky Project" débuted in Britain last year, the dominant narrative in the press was that of the prodigal son returning: the Royal Ballet-trained bad boy, now in his forties, had grown up. And, except for a few costume elements, it's true that there's little nose-thumbing in Clark's take on "Apollo" ("O"), "Rite of Spring" ("Mmm"), and "Les Noces" ("I Do"), presented in two programs at Lincoln Center's Rose Theatre. There are also little more than glancing references to the original scenarios and choreography. What's left is Clark's own response to the scores, which achieves kinetic interest only sporadically (mostly in "Les Noces"). It's all handsomely designed, clear in a Cunningham vein, and surprisingly dull. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. June 4-7 at 8.)

BRENDAN MCCALL
In 1957, Charles Starkweather and his fourteen-year-old girlfriend, Caril Ann Fugate, went on a killing spree through Nebraska. Since then, his story has inspired fiction by Stephen King, films by Terrence Malick and Oliver Stone, a song by Bruce Springsteen, and, now, a performance piece by McCall. Playing with the conventions of fifties noir, "Stark Weather" investigates the appeal of the true-crime tale. The folk-rock singer-songwriter Chrissy Coughlin plays live. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. June 5-7 at 8:30.)

"CHECK YOUR BODY AT THE DOOR"
Sally Sommer's vivid documentary about house dancers in New York during the late eighties and early nineties gets a showing, followed by a panel discussion with the house legend Archie Burnett and a dance party fuelled by DJ Chip Chop. (Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, 841 Barretto St. 718-842-5223. June 6 at 8.)

DANCEMOPOLITAN / DAVID PARKER AND THE BANG GROUP
"ShowDown," Parker's clever and eclectic approach to dance theatre—which incorporates everything from hoofing to ballet—finds its inspiration, and an underlying theme of rivalry between the sexes, in Irving Berlin's songs from the musical "Annie Get Your Gun," in recordings by Judy Garland and Howard Keel. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. June 6-7 at 9:30.)

"THE FRENCH COLLECTION"
The Joyce hosts a festival of French contemporary dance. First up, Compagnie Heddy Maalem presents Maalem's African-inspired staging of Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps," whose low-to-the-ground, fast-moving choreography was conceived in the chaos of the mega-city of Lagos, Nigeria. In Compagnie Maguy Marin's "Umwelt" ("Environment"), dancers appear and disappear amid a line of slats fashioned out of steel and mirrors; they shout out and drop detritus onto the stage while a machinelike soundscape roars. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Compagnie Heddy Maalem: June 10-11 at 7:30, June 12-13 at 8, June 14 at 2 and 8, and June 15 at 2 and 7:30; Compagnie Maguy Marin: June 17 at 7:30. Through June 28.)

DANCE BY NEIL GREENBERG
In "Really Queer Dance with Harps," four women and four men, all with flowers in their hair, move in gender-specific groups. Without being camp, the movement vocabulary keeps tilting toward the feminine, the languorous—at the extreme, the dancers look like dying swans—and the alternating groups invite comparison. The most interesting phrases turn out to be gender-neutral, and the proceedings are enlivened by Zeena Parkins's score, played right in the middle of the action by the composer and two other harpists. Greenberg himself dances in "Quartet with Three Gay Men," from 2006, which toys with the concept of flamboyance more overtly through a club-dance anthem by RuPaul. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. June 11-14 at 7:30. Through June 21.)

PALISSIMO/"BLIND SPOT"
Pavel Zustiak's choreography is imbued with a darkness that is both captivating and, at times, claustrophobic. This was true of his piece from last year, "Le Petit Mort," and it is so in "Blind Spot," his quartet from 2003, which is being remounted at P.S. 122. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. June 11-13 and June 15 at 8 and June 14 at 2 and 8.)

DOORKNOB COMPANY
As part of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Sitelines" series, the theatrical troupe run by Shannon Gillen and Elizabeth Motley stages a funeral for optimism at Bowling Green. The rite, a compendium of song and vigorous dance called "The Miracle Show and the Death of Optimism," *is satirical: the Doorknob Company* wants optimism to return. (Bowling Green Park at Cobblestone Plaza. 212-219-9401. June 16-17 at 12:30. Through June 26.)

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OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
Dance in the Berkshires recommences. The opening gala features Garth Fagan's company, down from Rochester and first up on the summer program, and Larry Keigwin's lively troupe, which finishes out the schedule in late August. Bill T. Jones, whose haunting "Chapel/Chapter" comes at the end of this month, dances a solo. Highlights for the remainder of the season include the U.S. début of the Israeli-born choreographer Hofesh Shechter, the talk of London, as well as the exquisite Indian dancer Shantala Shivalingappa and a theatrical version of David Michalek's "Slow Dancing," contrasting extreme slow-motion video portraits with live performance. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Gala: June 14 at 5. Through Aug. 24.)

"A Tattoo Artist and His Son, 2003," by Hiroh Kikai, in "Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan," at the International Center of Photography.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

REMARKABLE THEATRE BRIGADE: "GLORY DENIED"
Tom Cipullo's opera is an intimate melodrama about how the family of Colonel Jim Thompson, America's longest-held prisoner of war, coped—and cracked—after his return from Vietnam. Previewed last year, it gets a professional première from this intrepid small company; the Metropolitan Opera's Steven Crawford conducts. (Jan Hus Playhouse, 351 E. 74th St. June 5 and June 7 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

NEW YORK GILBERT & SULLIVAN PLAYERS
The joy and rapture that G. & S. fans crave will be on abundant offer at City Center this month, as New York's last professional company dedicated to the Savoy Operas offers the second half of a season that began there in January. Albert Bergeret—the company's modern major-general, as it were—conducts. June 6 at 8, June 8 at 3, June 10 at 7, and June 11 at 2: **"H.M.S. Pinafore."** ♦ June 7 at 2 and June 13 at 8: **"The Pirates of Penzance."** ♦ June 7 at 8 and June 14 at 2: **"The Mikado."** ♦ June 12 and June 14 at 8 and June 15 at 3: **"The Gondoliers."** (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "TOSCA"
If Lorin Maazel's chops as an opera conductor were ever in doubt, he firmly reëstablished them at the Met last winter when he led several powerful performances of Wagner's "Die Walküre." His next project takes him back to Avery Fisher Hall, where he will conduct a string of concert performances of Puccini's very Wagnerian verismo stunner. Hui He, Walter Fraccaro, and George Gagnidze will make their Philharmonic débuts in the leading roles; the New York Choral Artists and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus assist. (212-875-5656. June 12, June 17, and June 19 at 7:30 and June 14 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The last month of Lorin Maazel's penultimate season at the helm of the Philharmonic will be a whirl of activity. In addition to the concert performances of "Tosca," Avery Fisher Hall will also be the setting for a program that continues Maazel's multi-year Mahler cycle—in this case, the titanic Ninth Symphony, the composer's last completed work (and perhaps his most profound). (212-875-5656. June 4-5 at 7:30, June 7 at 8, and June 13 at 2.) ♦ The Philharmonic's attempt to move to Carnegie Hall may have been doomed, but for decades the hallowed place was the orchestra's rightful home—and to hear its musicians play in such splendid acoustics is a delight. For one night only, Maazel conducts them in the work with which he reintroduced himself to the orchestra, in 2000: "The Ring Without Words," his symphonic synthesis of highlights from Wagner's operatic tetralogy. (212-247-7800. June 11 at 8.)

PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF THE AMERICAS
Alondra de la Parra's young orchestra, which focusses on the music of North and South America, hosts the renowned Mexican percussion ensemble Tambuco for an evening in which two premières (of Jan Jarvlepp's "Garbage Concerto" and Eduardo Gamboa's "Fanfarria") will share the program with Revueltas's vibrant masterwork "The Night of the Mayas." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. June 6 at 7.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC
Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" is everyone's favorite fireworks music. But Michael Christie, the orchestra's music director, is taking a different tack by leading John Adams's pulse-racing, four-movement minimalist essay for string orchestra, "Shaker Loops," paired with a synchronized display over Lower Manhattan. (South Street Seaport. June 14 at 8. No tickets required.)

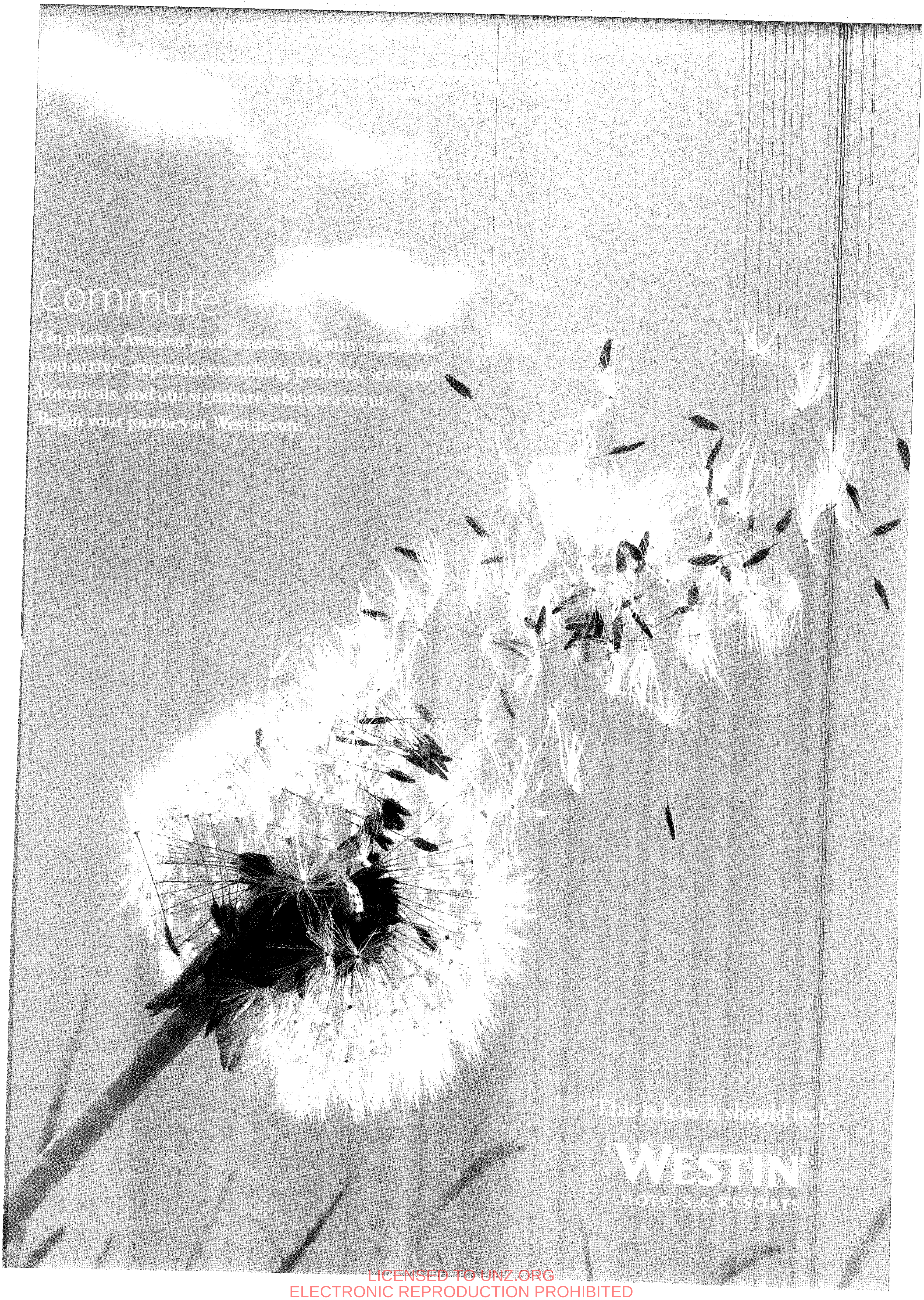
RECITALS

MANNES BEETHOVEN INSTITUTE
Every summer, concerts and symposia bloom at the New School's music college. The first—devoted to bedrock Beethoven—features a concert in which the magnificently brainy Brentano String Quartet joins Princeton's Scott Burnham for a performance (with lecture) of the Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 127. (Mannes Concert Hall, 150 W. 85th St. June 3 at 5. Tickets at the door. For information on all the Mannes Institutes, see www.newschool.edu/mannes/summer.)

BARGEMUSIC
A wide range of concerts tempt the ear at the floating chamber-music series. June 4 at 8: The young soprano Jody Sheinbaum offers a concert of contemporary art songs by such engaging composers as Lowell Liebermann, John Musto, Ben Moore, and Tom Cipullo. ♦ June 13 at 8: Inna Faliks loves the variation form so much that she's devoting a whole concert to the genre, hollowing out Bach's Goldberg Variations (only performing the opening and closing arias and one variation in between) and filling the void with works by Bright Sheng, Jennifer Higdon, Derek Bermel ("Kontraphunktus"), Lukas Foss, Fred Hersch, and David Del Tredici, among others. Works by Lera Auerbach and John Corigliano ("Fantasia on an Ostinato") are also featured. ♦ June 14 at 8 and June 15 at 4: The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's André-Michel Schub comes to Brooklyn to join the violinist Mark Peskanov (the series' director) and the cellist Dmitry Kouzov in three piano trios by Beethoven (including the "Ghost" and the "Archduke"). (Fulton Ferry Landing. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS
Adding viola (Lois Martin), percussion (Matthew Gold), and electronic sounds to the mix, the redoubtable contemporary-music ensemble offers an incisive group of modernist works on similar themes, including two of Mario Davidovsky's "Synchronisms" and Berio's "Sequenzas" Nos. I (for flute) and VIII (for violin), along with works by Sebastian Currier, Chinary Ung, and Christopher Rouse (the downright creepy "Rotae Passionis"). Paul Hostetter conducts. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. June 5 at 8.)

"WORDLESS AT WHITNEY LIVE"
The Whitney Museum of American Art is taking Ronen Givony's Wordless Music Series (which seems to gather buzz by the month) under its wing in June. The first of four concerts with the American Contemporary Music Ensemble pairs the group with the progressive percussion-and-electronica duo the Berg Sans Nipple. (Madison Ave. at 75th St. June 6 at 8. Free with museum admission.)



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HOTELS & RESORTS

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES
Orchestra musicians, always being told what to do, need to strike out on their own sometimes. The Philharmonic's virtuosos hold a regular series of events at Merkin Concert Hall. June 8 at 3: A quirky, hodgepodge program combines two fringy string quartets—Verdi's, and Vaughan Williams's early work in C minor—with the Suite from Stravinsky's "Soldier's Tale" and works by Berio and Paul Schoenfield. ♦ June 15 at 3: Two more out-of-the-way works (Hindemith's "Little Musical Flower Garden" and Britten's "Phantasy Quartet") are followed by Brahms's glorious String Sextet No. 1 in B-Flat Major. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

JOSHUA ROMAN
The outstanding young cellist—who was made principal at the Seattle Symphony at the age of twenty-two—offers an adventurous concert (with the pianist Evelyne Luest) of short works by Ned Rorem, Aaron Jay Kernis, and Lisa Bielawa along with the hefty (and challenging) sonatas for cello and piano by Britten and Elliott Carter. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. June 9 at 7:30.)

"THE MOVADO HOUR"
The Baryshnikov Arts Center's resident classical series, held in an elegant studio space with a view of the Hudson River, hosts a one-hour concert by the daring young string quartet Brooklyn Rider (made up of the violinists Colin Jacobsen and Johnny Gandelsman, the violist Nicholas Cords, and the cellist Eric Jacobsen). It offers works by Glass and Piazzolla as well as a set with the young club singer Christina Courtin, who performs her own songs. (450 W. 37th St. June 16 at 7. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 917-934-4966.)

OUT OF TOWN

HUDSON VALLEY CHAMBER MUSIC CIRCLE
This little series, bridging the gap between the end of the regular season and the sunburst of summer concerts, is the domain of the violinist Jamie Laredo and the cellist Sharon Robinson. The opening concert is offered by their friends in the Tokyo String Quartet, who will mix Webern's formidable String Quartet, Op. 28, with quartets by Haydn (in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1) and Beethoven (in A Minor, Op. 132). (Olin Hall, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-339-7907. June 7 at 8.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL: "L'ORFEO"
The Yale School of Music's summer program is making a bold return to opera, which was frequently presented in the Stoeckel Estate's exquisite Music Shed during the nineteen-fifties and sixties. Monteverdi's noble masterwork—the first of the genre—will be performed by a coterie of Yale singers, with the renowned Baroque violinist Robert Mealy leading the orchestra in immaculate period style. (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. June 14 at 2 and 8.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
Devoted to the art of the string quartet, this festival's performances are held in a whitewashed box of a hall with reverberant acoustics. The St. Petersburg String Quartet opens its classical season with a concert in which the group joins the veteran pianist Charles Rosen for a program of music by Shostakovich (the triumphant String Quartet No. 12 in D-Flat Major), Debussy, and Schumann (the Piano Quintet). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. June 15 at 3.)

MOVIES OPENING

CHRIS & DON: A LOVE STORY
A documentary by Tina Mascara and Guido Santi about Christopher Isherwood and the American artist Don Bachardy. Opening June 13. (Quad Cinema.)

DREAMS WITH SHARP TEETH
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening June 4. (Film Forum.)

ENCOUNTERS AT THE END OF THE WORLD
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening June 11. (Film Forum.)

THE HAPPENING
A thriller by M. Night Shyamalan, about a family that has to flee a worldwide catastrophe. Starring Mark Wahlberg, Zooey Deschanel, John Leguizamo, and Spencer Breslin. Opening June 13. (In wide release.)

THE INCREDIBLE HULK
Edward Norton co-wrote and stars in this action film, in which Bruce Banner tries to deal with his transformative ailment and must fight a beast called the Abomination. Also starring Liv Tyler, Tim Roth, William Hurt, and Robert Downey, Jr.; directed by Louis Leterrier. Opening June 13. (In wide release.)

KUNG FU PANDA
An animated comedy, about a panda who learns martial arts and must use them to defend his family. Directed by Mark Osborne and John Stevenson; with the voices of Jack Black, Dustin Hoffman, Jackie Chan, Ian McShane, Lucy Liu, and Angelina Jolie. Opening June 6. (In wide release.)

MONGOL
Sergei Bodrov directed this bio-pic, about Genghis Khan. In Mongolian. Opening June 6. (In wide release.)

MOTHER OF TEARS
A horror fantasy, set in Rome, directed by Dario Argento and starring his daughter Asia Argento as an art restorer pursued by a witch. Opening June 6. (Sunshine Cinema.)

MY WINNIPEG
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening June 13. (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

OPERATION FILMMAKER
A documentary, directed by Nina Davenport, about the attempt by a group of Americans in the movie business (including Liev Schreiber) to help an Iraqi film student. Opening June 4. (IFC Center.)

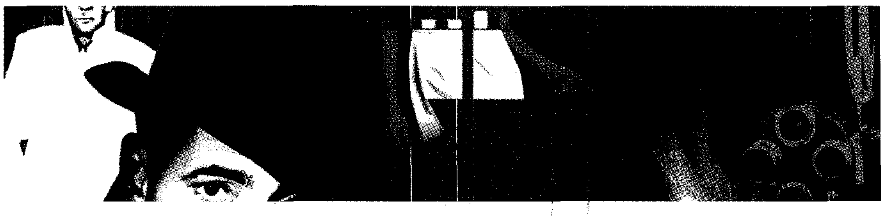
THE PROMOTION
Steve Conrad directed this comedy, about two supermarket employees (John C. Reilly and Seann William Scott) who compete for a managerial position. Co-starring Jenna Fischer and Lili Taylor. Opening June 6. (In limited release.)

WHEN DID YOU LAST SEE YOUR FATHER?
In this drama, a son reminisces about his dying father. Directed by Anand Tucker; starring Colin Firth, Jim Broadbent, and Juliet Stevenson. Opening June 6. (In limited release.)

YOU DON'T MESS WITH THE ZOHAN
A comedy, directed by Dennis Dugan and written by Judd Apatow, Robert Smigel, and Adam Sandler, starring Sandler as a Mossad agent who fakes his death in and becomes a hairdresser in New York. Opening June 6. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: PRINCE CASPIAN
The abrupt time shifts from England during the Second World War to Narnia's mythical past, and then back again, are bewildering to the uninitiated, but this latest C. S. Lewis adaptation is an acceptable grand-scale entertainment, with many overloaded battle scenes, talking centaurs, and digital duelling mice standing on their hind legs. Will the dark-bearded, vaguely Spanish Telmarines succeed in exterminating the woodland creatures, the Narnians? Prince Caspian (Ben Barnes), a great-looking Telmarine with heroic hair, switches sides and fights alongside the Narnians and their young kings and queens, who have returned from their own world. With the Italian actor Sergio Castellitto, as the gloomy, power-mad usurper Miraz, and Peter Dinklage, as the ill-tempered dwarf Trumpkin. Directed by Andrew Adamson, who



DVD NOTES
MAGIC CARPET RIDE

Alexander Korda's **"The Thief of Bagdad,"** a British production from 1940, is one of the best kids' movies ever made—perhaps because Korda, a Hungarian émigré who at times out-Angloed the Anglos, surrounded himself for this project with such a diverse group of moviemakers, including his brother Zoltan and William Cameron Menzies, as associate producers, and Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, and Tim Whelan, who co-directed. This "Arabian Nights" entertainment was shot mostly under a golden studio sun that shimmers on minarets and castle turrets and turns brown-skinned men to bronze. The Criterion DVD captures the slashing yet subtle Technicolor contrasts fashioned by the cinematographer, Georges Périnal, as well as by Vincent, the third Korda brother, who designed the production. They create a child's-eye view of a legendary age—and evoke the way kids feel when they first encounter the real world and think that it is magical.

The sixteen-year-old Sabu plays the title character, the right-hand urchin of a prince (John Justin), who is forced from his throne and blinded by a Wagnerian villain (the hypnotic Conrad Veidt) who also threatens to wed the prince's true love (June Duprez). The plot moves in uneven leaps and bounds, but the royal romance is symmetrical; the prince must gain a bride and regain his kingdom at the same time, an aspect of the movie that probably appealed to nineteen-forties lads who dreamed of winning both the Second World War and a woman. (As an inspired extra, the release includes, on a second disk, Korda's salute to the R.A.F., "The Lion Has Wings," from 1940.)

But it's Sabu, not Justin, who acts out the splashiest derring-do, mastering a genie (Rex Ingram) and wresting the All-Seeing Eye from the Goddess of Light. Caught in the Goddess's palace between a fearsome spider and a gelatinous marine monster, he arouses children's worst fears of the sky above and the sea below, only to douse those fears with a vengeance. But the film isn't bloodthirsty, and its more idyllic conceits are as striking as the action. This is one movie fantasy that indulges our childish love of play while warning us against getting lost in playland.

—*Michael Sragow*

JOHN RITTER

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wrote the script with Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely.—*David Denby* (In wide release.)

DREAMS WITH SHARP TEETH

For fans of Harlan Ellison, the angry, provocative science-fiction writer and essayist, this tightly constructed documentary by Erik Nelson is a nasty little dream come true. Along the way to writing more than seventy-five books, Ellison, who's hugely protective of his work (while attempting to defend it, he mailed a dead gopher to his publishing house and broke the pelvis of a television executive), has been a litigious crusader, fighting for writers' rights everywhere. A hero-worshipping portrait that's as much about Ellison's present as his past, the film features his cantankerous, blustery outbursts on everything from book signings to politics, as well as choice excerpts from past interviews. With testimonials from such science-fiction gurus as Neil Gaiman and Ron Moore and scenes of Ellison reading aloud from his stories, the film is like a trip to a great "Fantastic Planet"-like bookstore.—*Bruce Diones* (Film Forum.)

THE EDGE OF HEAVEN

A challenging new film from the director Fatih Akin, who revisits the ground that he covered so forcefully three years ago in "Head-On." The story splits its time between northern Germany, where a prostitute (Nursel Köse) enters the lives of a lecherous widower (Tuncel Kurtiz) and his sombre, studious son (Baki Davrak), and Istanbul, where the prostitute's daughter (Nurgül Yesilçay) is living a threatened existence. She is a political activist, but the fire in her seems to spread beyond politics; you feel it blazing into love when she flees Turkey for Hamburg and meets an equally hot-hearted young student (Patrycia Ziolkowska). Throughout the movie, people tack back and forth between the two countries, as if trying and failing to find safe haven; if any calm does emerge from such desperation, it comes from Hanna Schygulla, who returns to the screen with an extraordinary depiction of both bewilderment and strength. In her role as the student's mother, she helps Akin to suggest, once again, the enormous distances, geographical and spiritual, that people of every age and background can travel—surprising themselves in the act of transformation. In Turkish, German, and English.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/26/08.) (In wide release.)

ENCOUNTERS AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Werner Herzog's first-person documentary about his visit to Antarctica is not only a jaundiced spin on nature travelogues but an oddly revealing distillation of his career-long nexus of obsessions. Arriving at the McMurdo base, he discovers such banal appurtenances as a bowling alley and A.T.M.s, and what he calls "abominations such as an aerobics studio and yoga classes," and is seized with revulsion and a craving to get into the wilderness and experience the strangeness. His genre is the head trip, his worship of nature quasi-pagan, his chosen kin the adventurer élite, and his prejudice the dismissive lack of interest in everyone else. He is impressed by everything there that is overarching, awe-inspiring, intimidating, overpowering, crushingly colossal, or incomprehensibly strange, and his crabby, self-righteous misanthropy, which comes through in every frame, rises to apocalyptic dimensions: learning of the perils to polar ice caps posed by global warming, he foresees with barely repressed glee the extinction of humanity through climate change. Only the comedy latent in his own sour ironies distinguishes this film—and indeed many of the films in his career—from the grimly romantic antihumanism of Weimar-era mountain-climbing dramas.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

HAROLD & KUMAR ESCAPE FROM GUANTANAMO BAY

This cinematic burlesque show, in which the baggy pants keep dropping and occasionally fall off altogether, is perhaps the first bottomless comedy—much of the humor, and a fair amount of the nakedness, is concentrated below the belt. Harold (John Cho), a Korean-American financial guy, and Kumar (Kal Penn), an Indian-American would-be medical student, run afoul of the war on terror, get sent to Guantánamo, escape to the mainland, and wander around the South. The writer-director team of Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg, who also wrote (but did not direct) "Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle," have no better than primitive skills. By any rational standard, it's a terrible piece of work, yet its heart is in the right place. The chief fool here is a paranoid Homeland Security official (Rob Corddry), who sees everyone but whites as foreigners and likely terrorist collaborators. The Harold & Kumar movies, in their slovenly way, mark the transition to a post-racial society in which, as the *Salon* movie critic Stephanie Zacharek put it, "no one in real life can say definitively what an American looks like."—*D.D.* (5/19/08) (In wide release.)

"My Winnipeg," directed by Guy Maddin, opens June 13.

KIRSTEN ULVE

HATARI!

The title means "danger" in Swahili, and Howard Hawks's African adventure, from 1962, starts out with a trapper being gored by a rhinoceros, but these big-game hunters' real prey—and menace—is the opposite sex. The sprawling, good-humored, episodic story concerns a motley international group of freelance huntsmen (and their boss, a young woman) led by a hot-tempered Irishman, Sean Mercer (John Wayne), who are thrown into emotional disarray when a woman photographer (Elsa Martinelli) shows up. As ever with Hawks, the local politics are nothing (though the roughhousing young actors Gérard Blain and Hardy Krüger serve up a comic allegory of Franco-German reconciliation) and the subtleties of sexual psychology everything, as suggested by the dazzling wealth of innuendo—the tone is set early on when Krüger, standing close behind the French actress Michèle Girardon and zipping up her dress, says he's "only afraid of ripping something." There's plenty of drinking, joshing, fighting, and intimate maneuvering, and the remarkable scenes of animal trapping, filmed on location with the actors involved, make for exciting diversions. Ultimately, a woman-hunting elephant waving his trunk does a great Freudian job, set to Henry Mancini's jaunty music, and Red Buttons does a moving number as a Brooklyn cabdriver in exile whose heart does a U-turn.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; June 4, June 6, and June 8.)

INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL

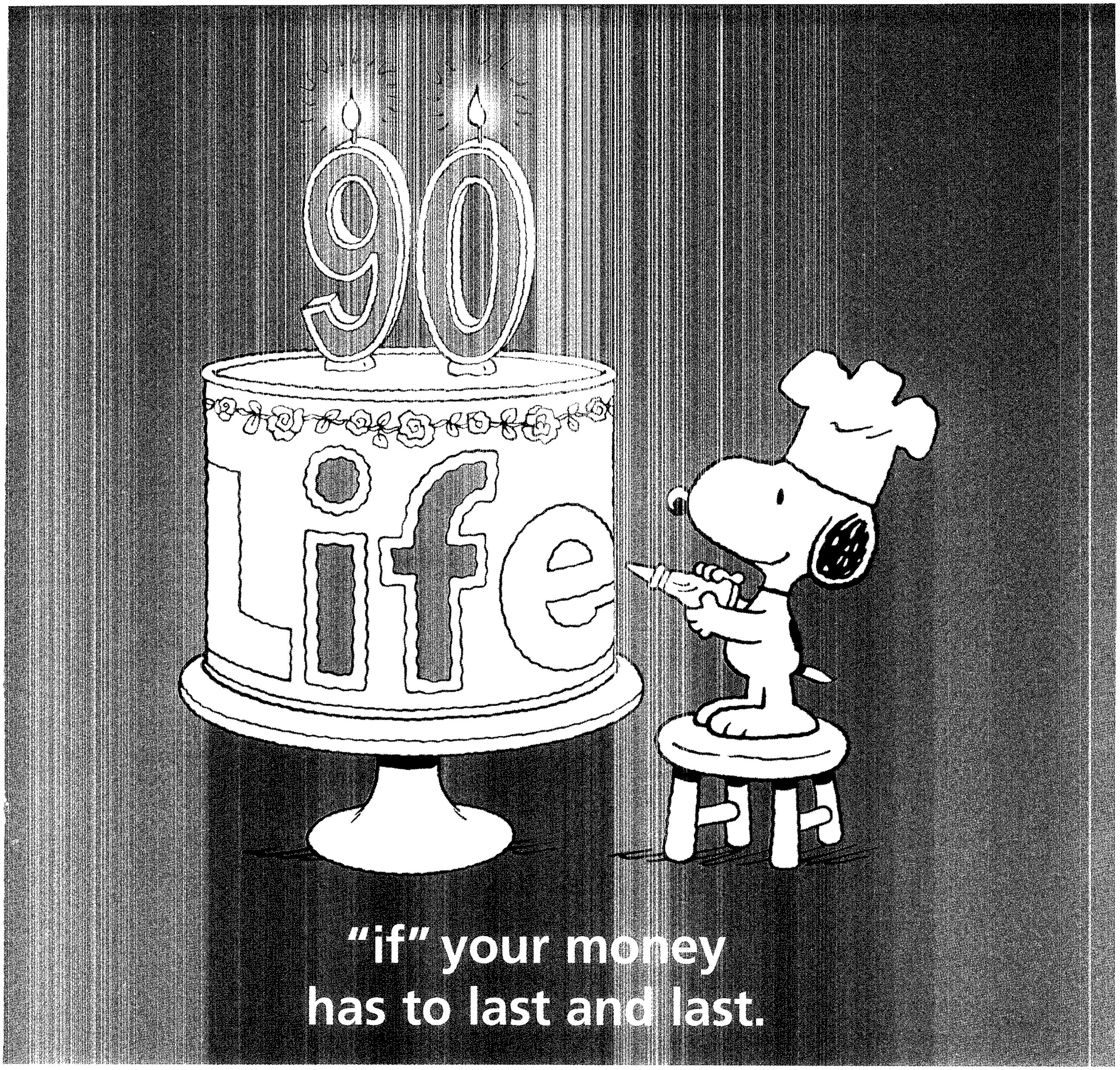
It isn't bad—there are a few dazzling sequences, and a couple of good performances—but the unprecedented blend of comedy and action that made the earlier Indiana Jones movies so much more fun than any other adventure series is mostly gone. Stretches of this picture are flat, fussy, and dull. (How many times can we enter those papier-mâché tombs?) Trying to regain the old rapture, you have to grasp at the few scenes that work—mainly in the beginning, when Steven Spielberg, setting the picture in 1957, captures the era's mixture of blandness, latent revolt, and apocalypse, showing the jukebox-and-pompadour youth culture alongside nuclear fears. The plot is incomprehensible gibberish about a crystal skull, the lost Amazonian city of Akator, and a brain-fried archeologist named Ox (John Hurt, who is anything but an ox). But there's a dandy, immensely complicated chase sequence in the jungle that links together physical improbabilities with the rhythm and speed of Buster Keaton (though on a much grander scale). Cate Blanchett is terrific as a slit-eyed, over-precise K.G.B. agent, but Harrison Ford, doing Indy again at sixty-five, doesn't appear happy. He's tense and glaring, and he speaks his lines with more emphasis than is necessary, like a drunk trying to prove he's sober. With Shia LaBeouf, Karen Allen, and Ray Winstone. Shot by Janusz Kaminski.—*D.D.* (6/2/08) (In wide release.)

IRON MAN

Robert Downey, Jr., as Tony Stark, billionaire arms manufacturer and playboy, almost completely dominates this whooshing junk pile. Nothing matters to Tony except inventing things and having a good time, and Downey, muttering to himself, ignores everyone else in the movie for as long as he can. Fixing his eyes at last on another character, he seems faintly annoyed that his privacy has been violated. Yet he delivers—to the camera, and to us. In this updating of the Marvel Comics character (who first appeared in 1963), Tony gets captured by wild-eyed fanatics who hang out in Afghan caves; they command him to make missiles out of scraps, but instead he creates a huge suit of armor and climbs into it. The monster shoots bullets and emits liquid flames from his gauntlets, and when he gets bored he just flies away. This superhero has no vulnerabilities or specialized skills; he's an all-purpose fighting vehicle—an airborne RoboCop. Most of the digital special effects look cheesy, and Terrence Howard and Gwyneth Paltrow drag themselves through embarrassing roles, but Jeff Bridges, as Obadiah Stane, Tony's treacherous No. 2 at the arms company, performs with professional skill. Directed by Jon Favreau.—*D.D.* (5/5/08) (In wide release.)

LITTLE FUGITIVE

At its core, this pioneering independent film from 1953 is just an urban heart-warmer, but it has a fresh, gritty surface and a Grade A horror-comic hook: a seven-year-old boy (Richie Andrusco), believing that he fatally shot his older brother, goes on the lam. Although the tension peaks when the boy pulls the trigger, that moment epitomizes claustrophobic mean-street queasiness and keeps the rest of the film from seeming sappy. Morris Engel, the cinematographer, who shares the writing and directing credits with



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Ruth Orkin (his wife) and Ray Ashley, uses a handheld camera to exploit all the wonders of Coney Island; the result is a lively essay on ball-toss games, deposit pop bottles, pony rides, and human midsections of all varieties as seen from the perspective of a four-foot-tall child. Truffaut paid homage to it as an inspiration for the French New Wave—and no wonder. This valuable record of love and pain on the beach captures unique vignettes, like that of a pair of lovers staking out a spot on the sand, then hiding their heads under a towel as they snuggle and smooch.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; June 7.)

TABLES FOR TWO
MIA DONA

d
mia dona
206

206 E. 58th St. (212-750-8170)—Mia Dona's failures are minor, but the accretion of them can feel major. The staff seems perpetually harried; one night, the hostess couldn't find a waiting party and exclaimed, when the impatient group approached to check on the status of its table, "You aren't who I thought you were!" On another evening, at 7:30, the kitchen was out of the pappardelle and the lamb, two of the more acclaimed items on the menu. Even as the surrounding tables were vacated and left empty, the remaining diners were hustled along: as one was slowly nibbling at the last bites of the addictively creamy *gnudi*, her plate was snatched from underneath her fork. And at 9 P.M. the waiter was explaining, "Because of the late hour, we are out of the panna cotta and the Sicilian ice-cream sandwich." Was this Manhattan or Boca Raton?

The restaurant, which opened in February, is the third collaboration between Donatella Arpaia and Michael Psilakis, after Dona (which closed last year) and Anthos. Meant to evoke "a home where Donatella would gather friends and family for a long Sunday afternoon supper," the narrow space is divided into three rooms: the "lounge" (whitewashed brick, black accents), the "living room" (floral wallpaper), and the "library" (blond wood, bookshelves). The menu offers a personalized wine list created by Arpaia ("Wine I Drink When I Don't Have to Pay the Check": a 2003 Château-Pape Clément, $400) and casual, homey Southern Italian fare from Psilakis. There's a strong whiff of maternal influence ("Wine I Learned from My Mother": a 2004 Aglianico del Vulture, $75).

Psilakis's menu largely succeeds: the pappardelle has a light, delectable coating of Bolognese sauce; the *polpettone*, hearty sage-infused meat loaf, is topped with a rosy crater of egg. Frying is occasionally used to good effect: salty baccalà, with a soft, slightly sweet interior, conceals an even better mild fried ricotta, and pickled French fries, regrettably now off the menu, were a pert combination of salty and sour. The fried rabbit, though, has heavy breading that all but obscures the gamy flesh it encases. And even when the Sicilian ice-cream sandwich was available, it fell short. By the time it reached the table, the gelato had melted and the brioche was too hard; only the table's most dedicated sweet tooth persisted in spooning it up. It felt less like home and more like an overwhelmed restaurant. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, Saturdays for dinner, and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrées $16-$25.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE SINGER
In 1974, Yves Montand, who had not sung onstage since 1968 (he kept busy acting in such political movies as "Z," "State of Siege," and "Tout Va Bien"), gave a concert in Paris for the benefit of Chilean refugees who had left their country in the wake of the military coup that deposed President Salvador Allende. Chris Marker, in this documentary of the singer's rehearsals and comeback performance, tells this backstory in opening title cards, but, more important, he ingeniously blends the politics with the music throughout. Montand's repertory, which includes a rousing ode to partisans, helps, as does his voice-over affirmation of his long-standing left-wing sympathies, rooted in his own youth as an immigrant laborer from Italy. Most of all, the singer's class solidarity is revealed and embodied in Marker's images—specifically, in the many closeups of Montand's large, strong hands. Seizing, shaping, refining, caressing the music with a workingman's athletic grace, Montand exudes a raw physical energy that carries a potent erotic charge (obviating the subtitles for the song "Coucher Avec Elle"). In the wake of the liberating force of the political and social upheavals of the nineteen-sixties, Marker asserts that leftists do it better—and he shows why. In French.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; June 10.)

MY WINNIPEG
Guy Maddin's conjoined fantasy-memoir of his home town, structured as a meditation on why he can't bring himself to leave it, starts on a cinematic high from which it has trouble recovering: raw footage of a series of takes of the elderly actress Ann Savage (star of the classic film noir "Detour," from 1945), in which the relationship between director and actress converges with that of son and mother. Maddin has the comic inspiration to sublet his family home and bring in actors (including Savage) to reënact scenes of his childhood there, and these scenes have such intense psychodramatic power that Maddin deflects and apostrophizes them through the elaborate gamesmanship that characterizes most of the film. Musings on mystical and mythopoetic energy, odd and lurid byways of the city's history, and rueful odes to bygone sites and pleasures, all accomplished with a hysterical profusion of fantastic and confected images that fuse borrowings from silent camp classics and the experimental cinema, emerge insubstantial and overcooked. Nonetheless, Maddin's idea is so good, and his intentions so clearly realized, that the film proves endearing and its aftereffect haunting.—*R.B.* (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

REPRISE
Joachim Trier's pseudo-intellectual, faux-modernist pastiche of New Wave moods and tricks tells the schematic story of two young writers in Oslo, lifelong friends whose careers intertwine and diverge. Phillip (Anders Danielsen Lie), the first to be published, goes mad and stops writing, ostensibly owing to his tempestuous relationship with Kari (Viktoria Winge), of which little is seen. Erik (Espen Klouman-Høiner), more sober and straightforward, earns acclaim a bit later but wonders whether his writing isn't merely derivative of two local writers, Sten Egil Dahl (a recluse whose name and persona are reminiscent of Jean-Luc Godard) and Tor Ulven (sounds like "Truffaut"). Both Phillip and Erik are obsessed with Paris, and Trier is dazzled by his own virtuosity—he films scenes in the conditional tense, parenthesized by an arch voice-over—but his film lacks any trace of the spontaneity, the cinematic savvy, or the self-revealing emotional openness of the French New Wave's masterworks. Moreover, for a film about writing, it's oddly disrespectful of it: when Phillip, after a long layoff, sits down at his computer again, we never find out what he comes up with. Trier and his co-scenarist, Eskil Vogt, have a keen sense of the rivalries and resentments at work in an ingrown circle of friends, but the vain gamesmanship pushes it to the sidelines. In Norwegian.—*R.B.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

SAVAGE GRACE
Based on a true story, though its moldy glamour-of-decadence mood comes straight from the movies. Julianne Moore plays the poor Irish beauty Barbara Daly, who, in the thirties, marries Brooks Baekeland (Stephen Dillane), a passively egotistical heir to a great fortune. Brooks is some kind of dilettante explorer; he lives in high style but has no interest in pleasing his demanding and theatrical wife, who makes scenes in public and embarrasses him. They travel from one vacation spot to another with their hothouse-plant son, Tony (Eddie Redmayne), who grows up intelligent, gay, and very much obsessed with his miserably unhappy mother. Pretty young lovers join them—it's an everyone-sleeps-with-everyone movie, though the droopy narration, taken from Tony's letters to his father, couldn't be more antisexual. The director, Tom Kalin, has an elegant eye for perfect beauty in apartments, hotel suites, and Spanish vacation houses, and Moore has a few scenes of vibrant neurotic rage, but the movie feels enervated and pointless. None of these people does anything worth caring about.—*D.D.* (IFC Center and 62nd & Broadway.)

SEX AND THE CITY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE CHILDREN OF HUANG SHI: In wide release. **MADE OF HONOR:** In wide release. **SANGRE DE MI SANGRE:** IFC Center. **WAR, INC.:** Angelika Film Center.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The later films of Howard Hawks. June 4 at 6:30, June 6 at 8:30, and June 8 at 3:30: "Hatari!" (†). ♦ June 4 at 9:30, June 6 and June 8 at 6:30, and June 7 at 9:30: "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (1953). ♦ June 5 at 6:30, June 7 at 4, and June 8 at 8:30: "Land of the Pharaohs" (1955). ♦ June 5 at 9:30 and June 7 at 7: "Man's Favorite Sport?" (1964). ♦ June 11 at 6:45, June 13 at 9:15, and June 14 at 3:30: "Rio Bravo" (1959). ♦ June 11 at 9:30, June 14 at 6:30, and June 15 at 3:30: "El Dorado" (1967). ♦ June 12 at 6:45, June 14 at 9, and June 15 at 8:45: "Rio Lobo" (1970). ♦ June 12 at 9:15, June 13 at 6:45, and June 15 at 6: "Red River" (1948). ♦ "Essential Cinema." June 8 at 6: Short films by Christopher Maclaine (1953-59). ♦ June 8 at 7:30: "Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania" (1971-72, Jonas Mekas). ♦ The films of Franco Piavoli. June 12 at 7:30 and June 14 at 8:30: "The Blue Planet" (1982). ♦ June 13 at 7:30 and June 15 at 8:30: "Nostos. The Return" (1989). ♦ "Voices Through Time" (1996). ♦ June 15 at 6:30: "At the First Breath of Wind" (2002).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through July 3: "Directors' Fortnight at 40." June 13-15 at 3 and 7 and June 16-19 at 4:30 and 8:10: "Céline and Julie Go Boating" (1974, Jacques Rivette; in French).

HONORE BROWN

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Godard's 60s." June 4-5 at 1, 2:45, 4:30, 6:15, 8, and 9:45: "Vivre Sa Vie" (1962; in French). ♦ In revival. June 6-12 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "The President's Analyst" (1967, Theodore J. Flicker). ♦ June 13-19 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Monsieur Verdoux" (1947, Charles Chaplin).

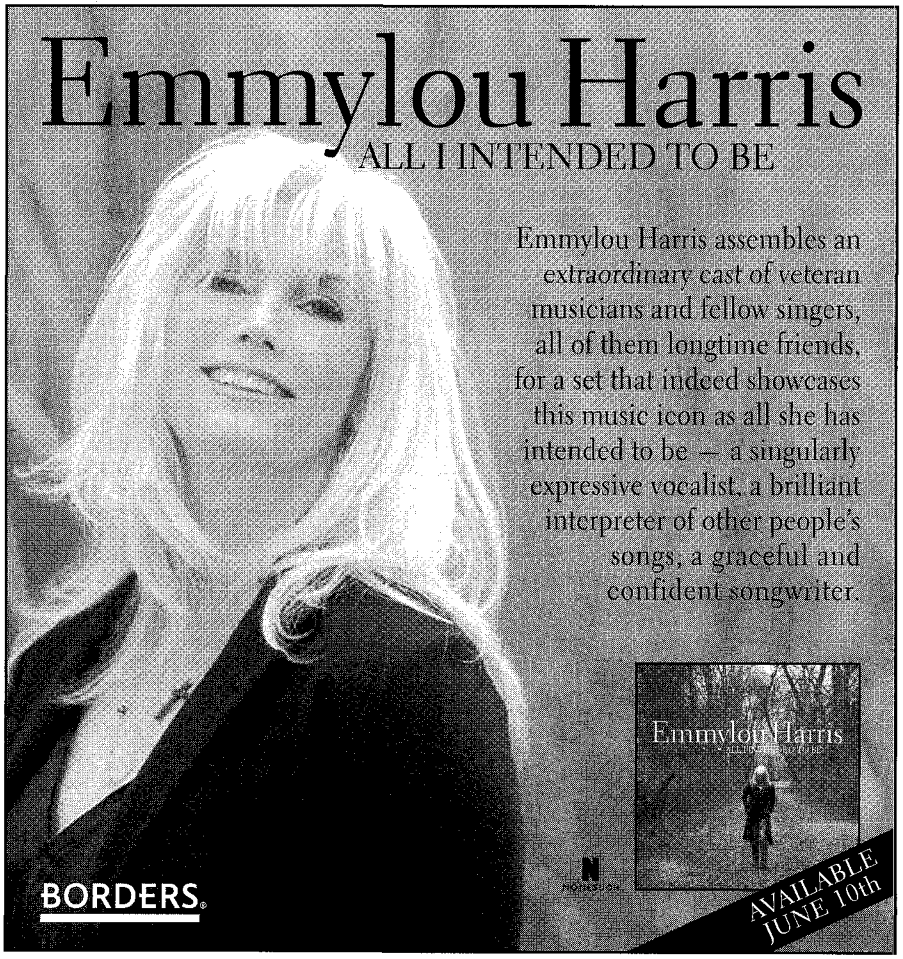
FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—*Through July 22: "Homage to Yves* Montand." June 10 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Singer" (†). ♦ June 17 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Case Against Ferrot" (1976, Alain Corneau; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The films of Kenji Mizoguchi. June 13-15 at 11 A.M.: "Sansho the Bailiff" (1954; in Japanese). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." June 6-7: "Zardoz" (1974, John Boorman). ♦ June 13-14: "Eraserhead" (1977, David Lynch).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." June 4-6 at 1:30: "The Maltese Falcon" (1941, John Huston). ♦ June 11-13: "All About Eve" (1950, Joseph L. Mankiewicz). ♦ Special screenings. June 5 and June 9 at 8, June 6 at 8:30, June 7 at 2:45, and June 8 at 4: "The Wedding Director" (2006, Marco Bellocchio; in Italian). ♦ June 9 at 7; June 11 at 6:30; June 11 at 8:15; June 12 at 6:30 and 8:15; June 13 at 4:30; June 14 at 4:30, 6:30, and 8:15; June 15 at 4:30; and June 16 at 8:30: "Derek" (2008, Isaac Julien). ♦ June 13 and June 19 at 8:15, June 14 at 2:15, June 15 at 2, June 16 at 6:30, and June 18 at 5: "Warsaw Bridge" (1990, Pere Portabella; in Spanish and Catalan). ♦ "Jazz Score." June 4 at 6:30: "The Criminal," a.k.a. "The Concrete Jungle" (1960, Joseph Losey). ♦ June 4 at 8: "Alfie" (1966, Lewis Gilbert). ♦ June 5 at 6 and June 9 at 6:15: "A Bucket of Blood" (1959, Roger Corman). ♦ June 6 at 6 and June 8 at 2:30: "The Pawnbroker" (1964, Sidney Lumet). ♦ June 6 at 8:30 and June 8 at 5: "In Cold Blood" (1967, Richard Brooks). ♦ June 7 at 2:30: "The Wild One" (1953, László Benedek). ♦ June 7 at 6 and June 12 at 8:15: "The Organization" (1971, Don Medford). ♦ June 7 at 8:15 and June 12 at 6: "The Taking of Pelham One Two Three" (1974, Joseph Sargent). ♦ June 13 at 6 and June 15 at 2:30: "Breathless" (1959, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ "Celebrating Summer." June 4 at 8:30: "My Hustler" (1965, Andy Warhol and Chuck Wein). ♦ June 6 at 6:15 and June 8 at 2: "Under the Sand" (2000, François Ozon; in French). ♦ June 7 at 5: "Little Fugitive" (†).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine @Midnight." June 6-7: "Klute" (1971, Alan J. Pakula). ♦ June 13-14: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968, Stanley Kubrick).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screening. June 5 at 7:30: "Judy Berlin" (1999, Eric Mendelsohn), followed by a Q. & A. with the director and the actress Edie Falco. ♦ "Open Roads: New Italian Cinema." All films are in Italian. June 6 at 2 and June 7 at 4:15: "The Girl by the Lake" (2007, Andrea Molaioli). ♦ June 6 at 4 and June 8 at 8:45: "Don't Think About It" (2007, Gianni Zanasi). ♦ June 6 at 6:30 and June 10 at 2: "Days and Clouds" (2007, Silvio Soldini). ♦ June 6 at 9:15 and June 9 at 3:10: "Piano Solo" (2007, Riccardo Milani). ♦ June 7 at noon and June 9 at 5:20: "An Unusual Time to Meet" (2007, Stefano Coletta). ♦ June 7 at 2 and June 9 at 9:30: "The Sweet and the Bitter" (2007, Andrea Porporati). ♦ June 7 at 6:30 and June 11 at 8:30: "Saturn in Opposition" (2007, Ferzan Ozpetek). ♦ June 7 at 9:15 and June 9 at 1: "Night Bus" (2007, Davide Marengo). ♦ June 8 at noon and June 11 at 4:15: "The Waltz" (2007, Salvatore Maira). ♦ June 8 at 6:15 and June 10 at 4:15: "The Right Distance" (2007, Carlo Mazzacurati).



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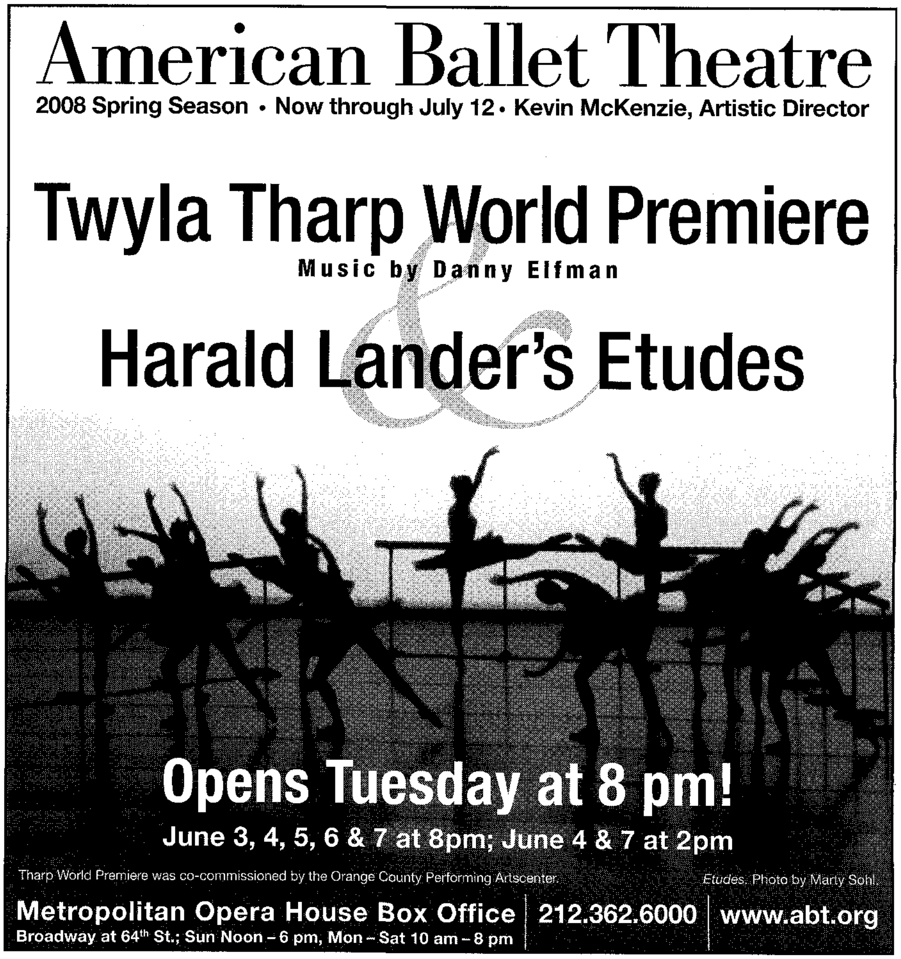

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Twyla Tharp World Premiere
Music by Danny Elfman
&
Harald Lander's Etudes

Opens Tuesday at 8 pm!
June 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 at 8pm; June 4 & 7 at 2pm

Tharp World Premiere was co-commissioned by the Orange County Performing Artscenter.
Etudes. Photo by Marty Sohl.

Metropolitan Opera House Box Office | 212.362.6000 | www.abt.org
Broadway at 64th St.; Sun Noon – 6 pm, Mon – Sat 10 am – 8 pm

READINGS AND TALKS

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
The Queens museum brings Werner Herzog to the Times Center, a theatre and event space in the new *Times* skyscraper. The filmmaker will be interviewed by the director Jonathan Demme. (242 W. 41st St. 718-784-4520. June 5 at 6:30.)

"MAD. SQ. READS"
Richard Price offers selections from his new novel, "Lush Life." (Madison Square Park, Fifth Ave. at 24th St. For more information, call 212-538-6667. June 5 at 6:30.)

NEW YORK INSTITUTE FOR THE HUMANITIES
The institute, along with the Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art, has organized a daylong symposium on June 6, starting at 11 A.M., addressing the cultural significance of comics. Linda Barry, Gary Panter, Art Spiegelman, and Mo Willems are among the many participants. The event precedes MOCCA's annual Art Festival, in the Puck Building (293 Lafayette St.), which runs June 7-8. (Cantor Film Center, 36 E. 8th St. No tickets necessary. For more information, visit nyih.as.nyu.edu and www.moccany.org.)

TIPA PROJECT READING
TIPA, which stands for Toward International Peace Through the Arts and is the work of the marketer turned activist Stan Tannen, celebrates Alexander Pushkin's birthday. The actor Marian Seldes will read from "Eugene Onegin." (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. June 6 at 12:30.)

"BLOOMSDAY ON BROADWAY"
The annual reading from Joyce's "Ulysses" takes place June 16, starting at 7. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

RED HOOK HAPPENINGS
A sunset picnic and film festival kick off the Red Hook Waterfront Arts Festival on June 6. It continues the next day with performances by the pirate-puppet-and-rock act Jollyship the Whiz-Bang, the Asian-Afro-beat ensemble Amayo's Fu-Arkist-Ra, the salsa duo Paradizo Dance, and the Calpulli Mexican Dance Company. (Louis J. Valentino Jr. Park and Pier, Coffey St. at Ferris St., Brooklyn. For more information, visit www.dtetc.org. June 6, at dusk, and June 7, from 11 to 7.) ♦ "Hip Hop Generation Next" turns Coffey Park into a block party. The hyper-athletic Chicago dance crew FootworKINGz, whose members have performed with Madonna and Missy Elliott, is making its New York City début. (Visitation Pl., between Dwight and Richards Sts. For more information, call 212-625-3505. June 14, from 1 to 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Given the favorable results of the recent Impressionist-modern, American, and contemporary sales, the auction houses can finish the season with their heads held high. Antiquities—including exquisite statues of goddesses—are the order of the day. **Christie's** Roman specimen, which headlines its antiquities sale (June 4), is a depiction of Tyche carved in purple porphyry, seated pensively on an outcrop of rocks. The house's sale of printed books, manuscripts, and Americana a few days later (June 12) includes one of the first hundred copies of Joyce's "Ulysses," printed in Paris in 1922, as well a letter from George Washington to the German Lutheran Congregation of Philadelphia, recently found in a Pennsylvania farmhouse. And should one need a Jean Royère sideboard on which to place a newly acquired Roman amphora, the house obliges with an auction of twentieth-century decorative art and design (June 13). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** auction of antiquities (June 5) features a twenty-inch bronze statue of a goddess from the late Hellenistic or the early Roman-imperial era, probably Tyche, standing in a gracefully torqued pose, her garment gathering in cascading folds at her feet. Old Master and nineteenth-century paintings are the subject of two sales (June 5-6), in which still-lifes, genre scenes, and landscapes (including several depictions of Venice by Albotto, Guardi, and Gabriele Bella) predominate. The house's sale of twentieth-century design (June 14) includes an entire pavilion, designed by the Japanese-born architect Shigeru Ban for the Salone Internazionale del Mobile in 2007. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Doyle** holds its thrice-yearly showcase of Belle Époque opulence (June 4), offering such decorative delights as an Art Deco figure of a torch dancer in a deep back bend and a delicious "mystery clock," in which a tiny cupid, standing upright in a shell-shaped gondola, marks the hours with his oar. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.) ♦ **Phillips** is putting on one of its periodic selling exhibitions, this time of sculptures and design elements by the Cairo-born architect Hani Rashid (June 5-28), as well as an auction of design (June 12) with an emphasis on cutting-edge works by such big names as Zaha Hadid, Marc Newson, and Ron Arad. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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"Die Soldaten," at the Park Avenue Armory.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
THE ACTOR FACTOR
June 20-July 17

The actor Tatsuya Nakadai, born in 1932, made his big-screen début in 1953 and has since starred in such Japanese masterworks as Kurosawa's "High and Low" and Ichikawa's "Odd Obsession." These films and others, including Kobayashi's ten-hour epic, "The Human Condition," will be presented at Film Forum's retrospective of Nakadai's long career, and the man himself will be present on opening night. (212-727-8110.)

ART
REEL TIME
June 29-Sept. 15

It makes sense that an artist who painted pictures of melting clocks would be drawn to the temporal medium of the movies. "Dali: Painting and Film," at MOMA, will exhibit more than a hundred of Dali's Surrealist works as well as his collaborations with such filmmakers as Luis Buñuel ("Un Chien Andalou"), Alfred Hitchcock (the dream sequence in "Spellbound"), and Walt Disney (the short "Destino," begun in 1946 and finished by Roy Disney in 2003). (212-708-9400.)

THE THEATRE
META-MUSICAL
July 5

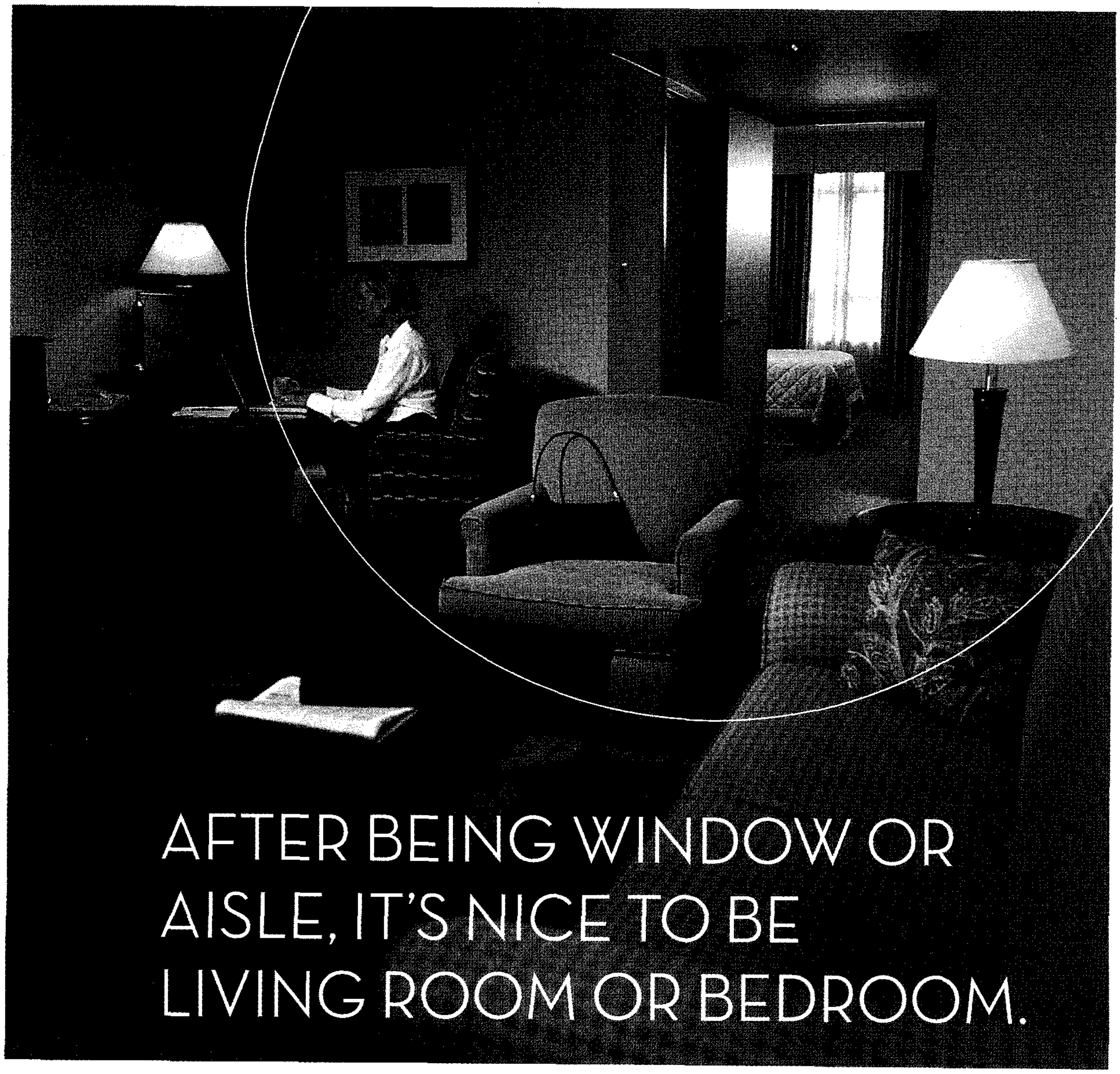
"[title of show]," a musical comedy by Jeff Bowen and Hunter Bell about two writers and two actresses who try to create a musical about trying to create a musical, comes to the Lyceum. Michael Berresse directs. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
WAR SCENES
July 5, July 7, July 9, and July 11-12

The Lincoln Center Festival's classical schedule will be dominated by one monster offering: the Ruhr Triennale production of the scabrous antiwar opera "Die Soldaten," in a spectacular staging at the Park Avenue Armory. (212-721-6500.)

NIGHT LIFE
TRUTH OR DARE
July 12

The Lincoln Center Festival presents "Damon Albarn & the Honest Jon's Revue," which features the Malian guitarist and singer Afel Bocoum, the soul singer Candi Stanton, and other acts on the Gorillaz front man's record label. (www.lincolncenter.org.)



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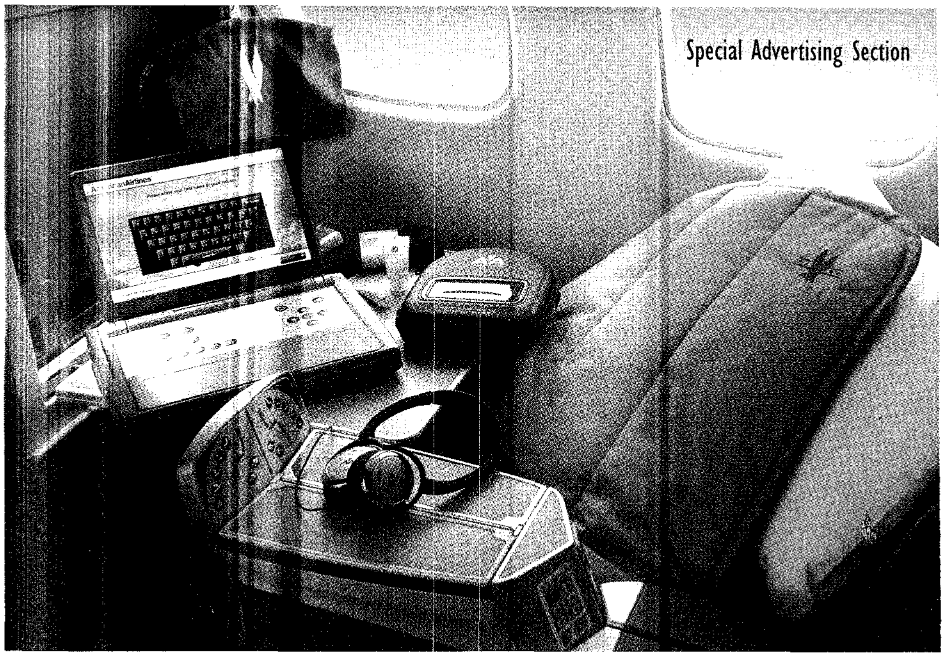

HEAD OF THE CLASS

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Realizing how important it is for passengers to be comfortable on long-haul flights, American has completed reconfiguration of its 767-300 Business Class cabins and introduced upgrades on more than half of its 777 aircraft. Service to cities in Europe and Asia and on select routes in the United States and Latin America will provide customers with seating enhancements, updated cabin design, a wide selection of entertainment choices, and a variety of new culinary offerings.

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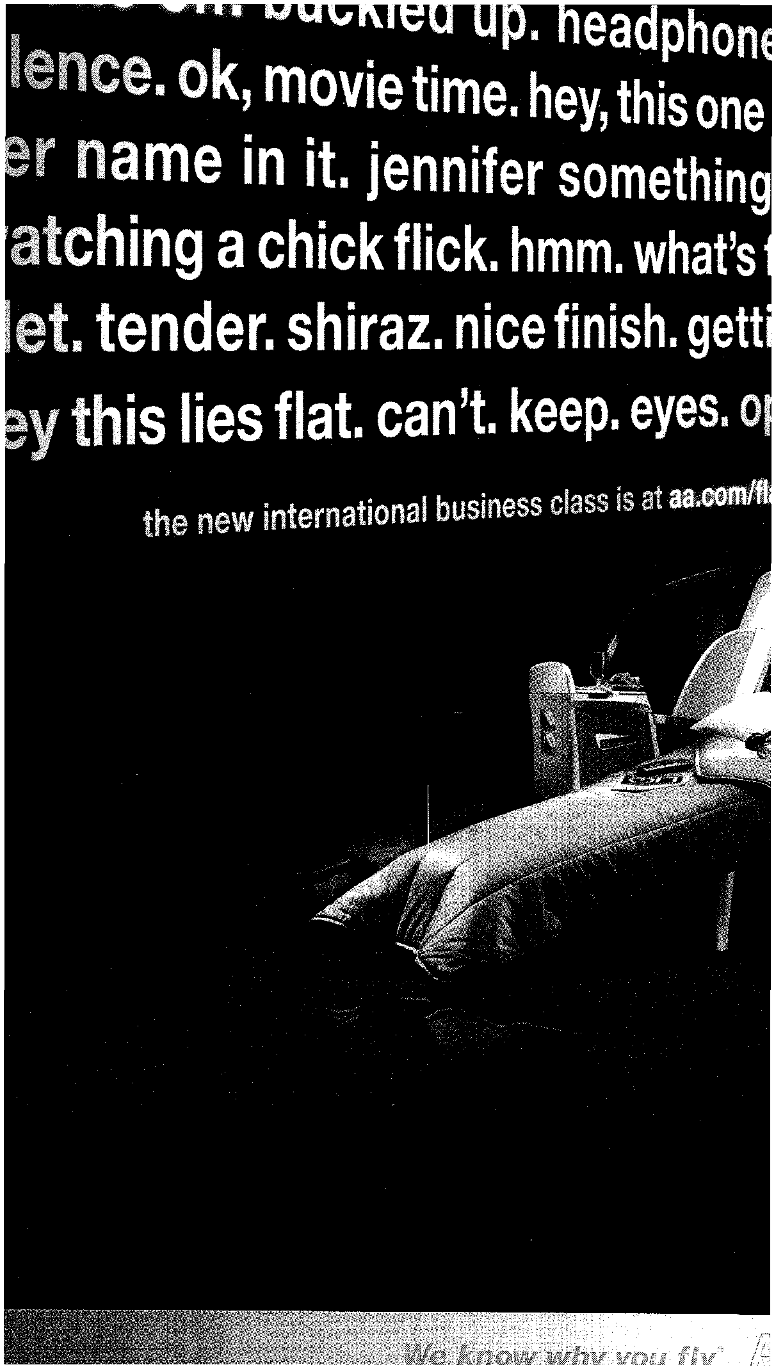

buckled up. headphone

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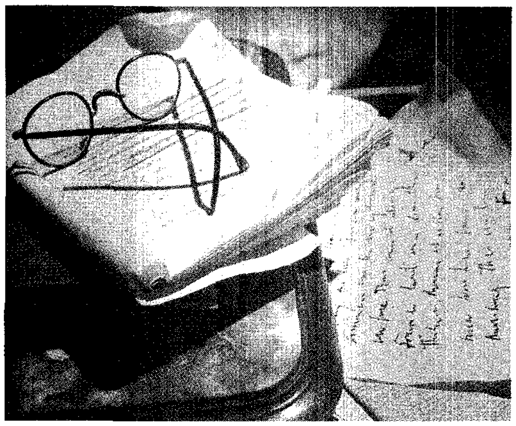

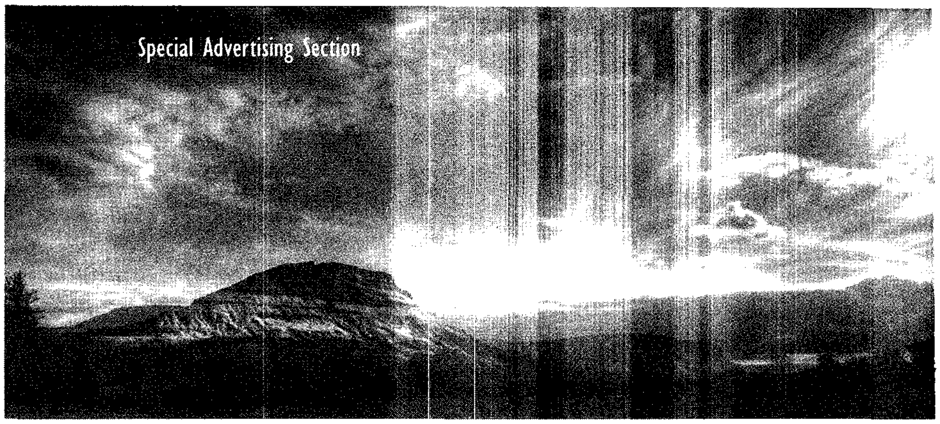

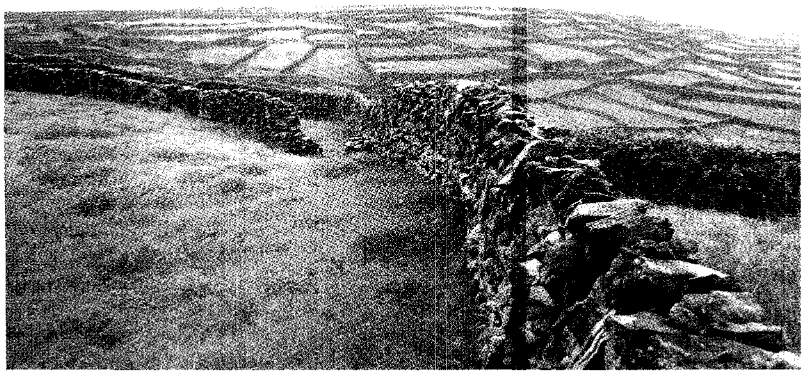

IRELAND LIVE!

Fans of literary giants who sprang from Irish soil and made immeasurable contributions to world literature can trace the lauded scribes' footsteps when visiting.

Perhaps no one writer is more closely associated with Ireland than James Joyce. Walking tours that depart from Dublin's James Joyce Centre, which also hosts the annual June 16th Bloomsday celebration, behold the streets and pubs the author frequented and locations commemorated in his novels.

Trinity College, where Dublin-born Samuel Beckett studied and lectured, named a theatre after the playwright of "Waiting for Godot" that has become a major venue for both the annual Dublin Fringe (September 6th–21st) and Dublin Theatre (September 25th–October 12th) festivals. Literary types checking into The Shelbourne Dublin hotel espy two life-sized diptychs of Godot's Vladimir and Estragon in the reception area.

William Butler Yeats spent his childhood in Sligo in northwestern Ireland and returned there often as an adult. Its folklore and dramatic scenery, particularly Ben Bulben mountain, were lifelong inspirations to the Nobel laureate. In one of his last poems, he foretold his final resting place: "Under bare Ben Bulben's head/In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid."

A Yeats Festival lineup showcases plays, poetry readings, and concerts (July 26th–August 8th). The Yeats International Summer School, which next year will mark its fiftieth anniversary, presents two weeks of concentrated academic study, and runs concurrently with the fest.

Born near Dublin, John Millington Synge was advised by Yeats, his mentor, to retreat to the remote Aran Islands off Ireland's west coast, to develop his writer's voice. Travelers can visit the cottage where "The Playboy of the Western World" playwright lived and wrote, and Synge's Chair, a circular stone wall overlooking the ocean, where he found inspiration. At the annual July Synge Summer School in more-accessible Wicklow, the syllabus includes tours, seminars, and theatre.

A son of Belfast, C.S. Lewis is remembered at the Linen Hall Library—which has a complete collection of his works—and on the C.S. Lewis Trail. On the map are houses where Lewis lived, as well as the bronze centenary statue of "The Searcher," based on the character of Digory Kirke (Lewis' fictional alter ego) opening a wardrobe he built, a magical object that served as the portal to Narnia.

County Derry, in Northern Ireland, where Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney was raised on a farm, provides context for many of his best-known poems, including "At a Potato Digging." The owners of a guesthouse near his birthplace, which remains largely rural today, offer a guided tour of Heaney landmarks sanctioned by the poet.

Until his death, the playwright John B. Keane could be found behind the bar of his eponymous pub in Listowel, a small town in County Kerry. Keane wrote eighteen plays, and once told the BBC, "I am never stuck for words...all I have to do is look out of the window."

Keane was an enduring presence at the annual Listowel Writers' Week, which takes place this year from May 28th to June 1st; Heaney is among the featured attendees.

Any time of year, visitors still can pause for a pint at the John B. Keane pub in Listowel. Billy Keane, son of the publican-playwright and an author in his own right, now draws the drafts.

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: JOYCE'S PERSONAL EFFECTS ©GRACE S. YANG; SLIGO LANDSCAPE ©AUSTIN FOLEY; YEATS MONUMENT ©[illegible]; ARAN ISLANDS LANDSCAPE ©[illegible]

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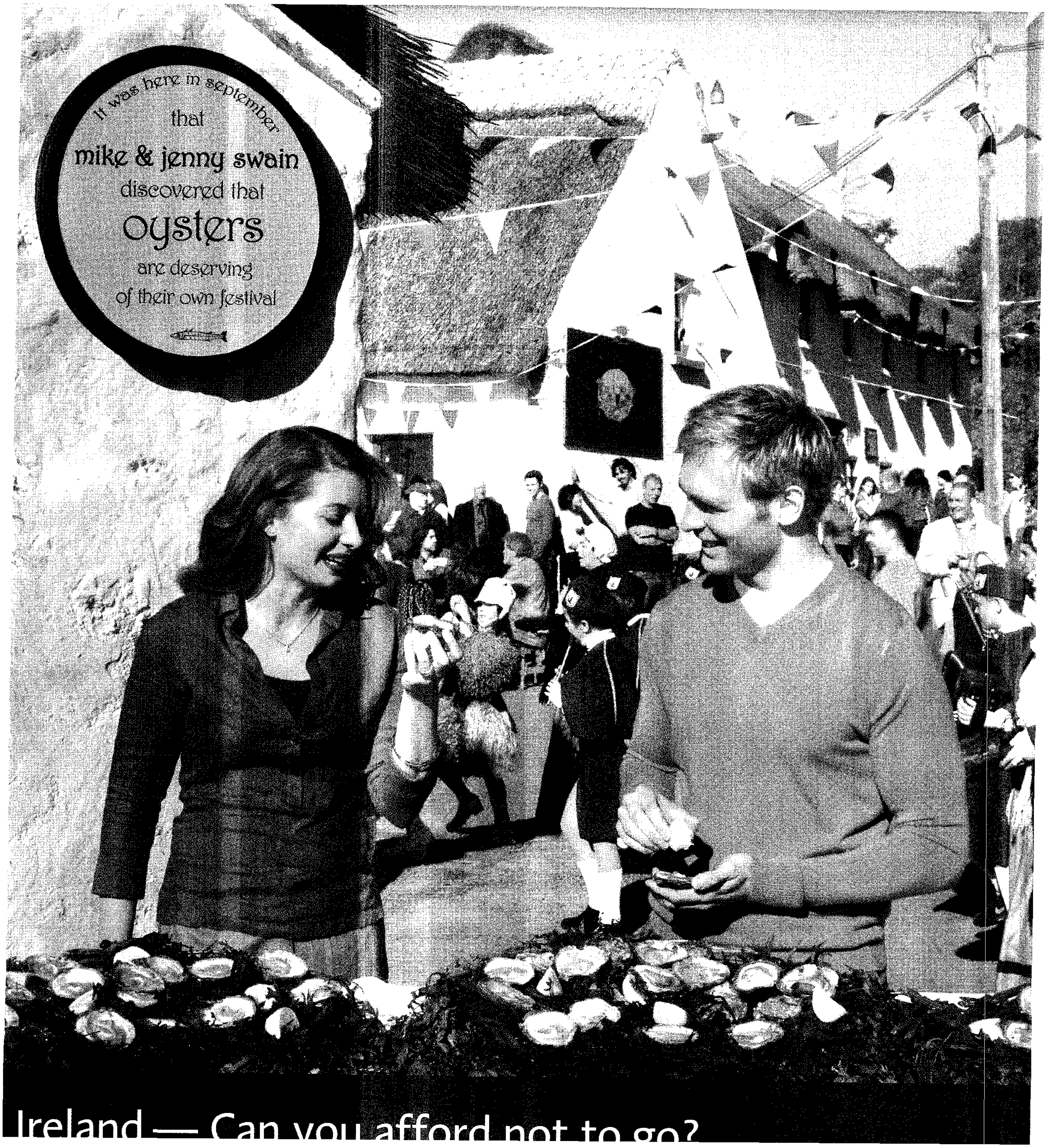
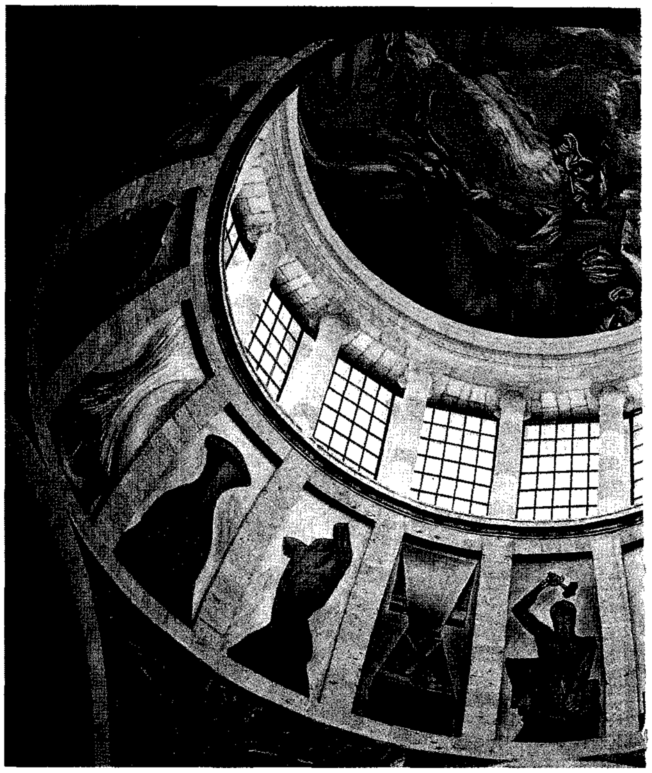

It was here in september
that
mike & jenny swain
discovered that
oysters
are deserving
of their own festival
Ireland — Can you afford not to go?



THIS PAGE, *LEFT TO RIGHT:* LA PARROQUIA DE SAN MIGUEL ARCANGEL ©KAREN HUNT/CORBIS; OROSCO MURAL, GUADALAJARA ©NANCY LEHRER

Where the Past Is Preserved

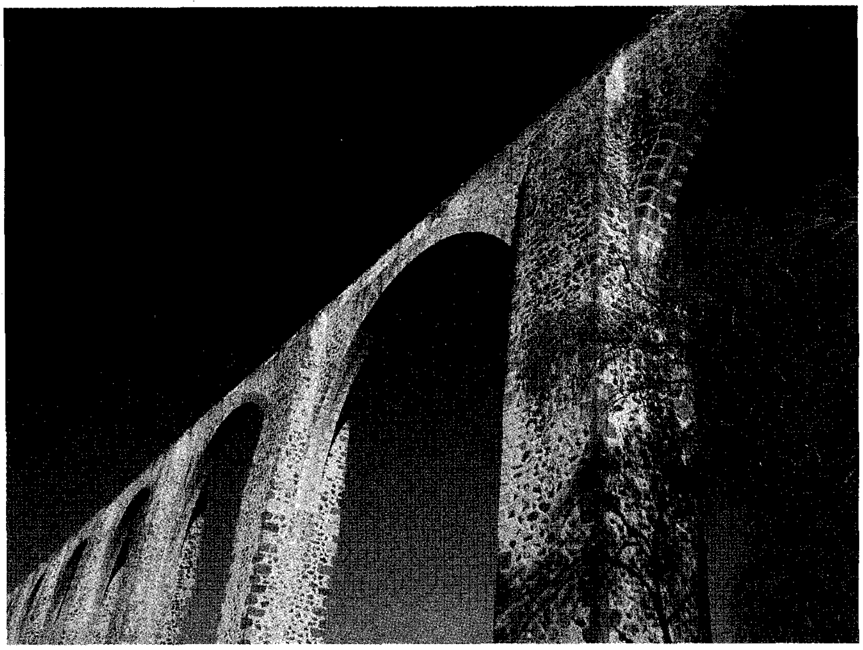
The search for an authentic experience is leading travelers to Mexico's colonial cities, where busy plazas, open-air markets, historic buildings, and winding streets reflect a mix of Spanish and native influences on the country's architecture, culture, and cuisine. Southeast of Mexico City, **Puebla** is famous as the birthplace of the spicy chocolate *mole poblano*, allegedly created by nuns at the convent of Santa Rosa who were cooking for a visiting archbishop.

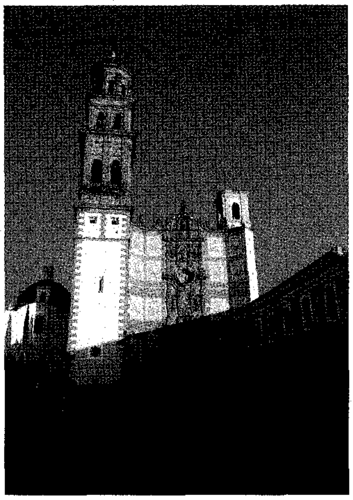
Puebla is also known for its seventeenth-century blue-grey cathedral and its hand-painted Talavera ceramics, used for tiles and dishes that still decorate the city. Another contribution to Mexico's rich history is the national holiday Cinco de Mayo, celebrating Mexico's victory over French troops at Puebla on May 5, 1862.

In the western state of Michoacán, **Morelia** also boasts an impressive cathedral—with ornate twin towers more than two hundred feet high and an organ that has 4,600 pipes. Fittingly, Morelia hosts an international organ festival every May.

About three hours from Morelia, the Rosario Butterfly Sanctuary is the winter home for millions of migrating monarch butterflies, typically visiting from November through March. Arrive early in the day while these easily recognizable black-and-orange patterned beauties are still clinging to the trees.

Also near Morelia, **Pátzcuaro** is a popular destination for Mexico's November 1st Day of the Dead celebrations. The town's festivities extend to Lake Pátzcuaro, where boats adorned with candles and flowers serve as floating memorials for reflection.





museo
y casa de la cultura de
guanajuato.
Diego Rivera

Northwest of Mexico City, **Guanajuato** is an old silver-mining town with colorfully painted buildings and meandering cobblestone streets perfect for strolling. The Jardín de la Unión serves as the city's meeting place, with sidewalk cafés and a bandstand hosting outdoor concerts. Guanajuato's cultural highlights include the Diego Rivera House Museum, located in the home where the painter was born, and the International Cervantes Festival, a three-week celebration of exhibitions and performances held each October.

Another historic mining town is **Santiago de Querétaro**—or simply Querétaro—which has a vibrant political history. Its main plaza is the Plaza de la Independencia, a nod to the city's role in Mexico's fight for independence from its Spanish rulers. Querétaro is where Emperor Maximilian surrendered in 1867 and is the birthplace of Mexico's constitution, but these days the city's colonial heritage is expressed through its architectural legacy: Baroque mansions with ornate balconies overlook quaint plazas and streets.

Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city, has a similarly colonial feel, with large plazas and a twin-towered cathedral. Two of the city's architectural landmarks are the Government Palace, where officials relocated when Mexico City was under siege, and the Rotunda de los Hombres Ilustres, a pillared monument surrounded by statues honoring Guadalajara's famous residents.

Throughout Mexico's colonial cities, this mix of traditions offers a rich cultural experience for travelers seeking a place where the past is still very much alive.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: QUERÉTARO AQUEDUCT ©DANNY LEHMAN/CORBIS; DIEGO RIVERA HOUSE MUSEUM ©HILARY WALKER; TEMPLO DE SAN FRANCISCO ©CHRIS UEBELHOR

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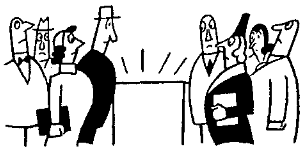
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
STRUGGLES

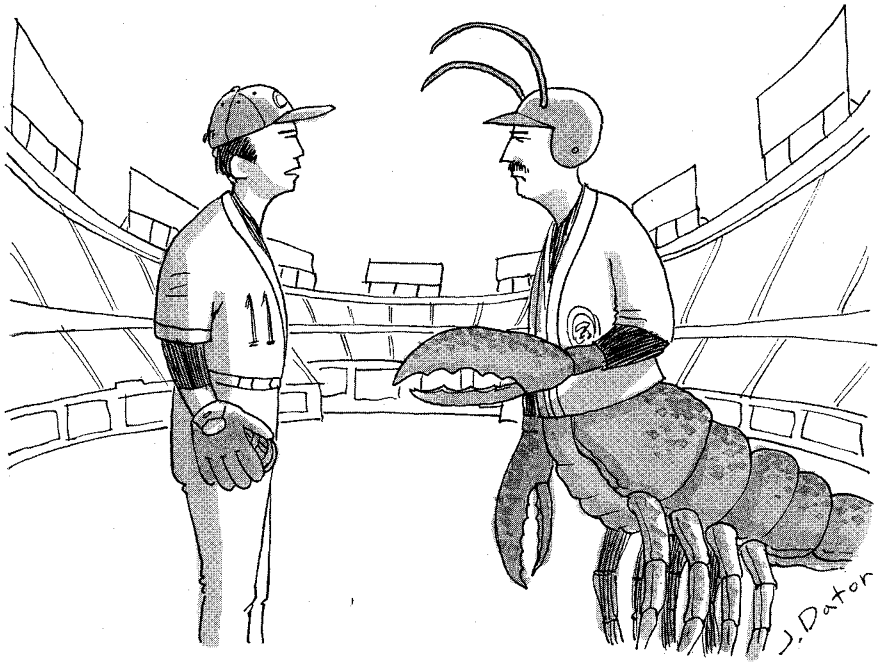


At first glance, the photograph flashed on news reports around the world—an image of a man burning in South Africa, necklaced with a rubber tire that had been doused in gasoline and set aflame—looked like a relic from the days of apartheid. Necklacing was common then: it was the way that enforcers of the revolutionary African National Congress made an example of informers who betrayed their struggle for majority rule. That struggle was finally won at the ballot box fourteen years ago, but the photograph of the burning man was taken last month, as South African mobs tore through the country's townships and shantytowns, hunting down foreigners. The young men who formed the core of the mobs were armed with everything from hammers and whips to machetes and guns, and they were not easily deterred. Even when President Thabo Mbeki, who sat silently by during the first ten days of the pogroms, called out the Army, the violence continued, and once again the photographs of the confrontations recalled the township showdowns of yore: uniformed sharpshooters firing into the throng, albeit with rubber bullets.

Roughly five million of the fifty million people who live in South Africa are migrants from elsewhere on the continent—Malawi, Nigeria, Congo, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. They came in the years since apartheid, seeking political refuge or economic opportunity or both, and their presence could be seen as a measure of South Africa's success: the nation that once produced asylum seekers had become a place of asylum. But the banishment of white-supremacist rule did not bring an end to South Africa's divisiveness and inequality; the terms were merely reconfigured. In the place of political violence, the nation has been plagued by one of the highest rates of violent crime in the world. Most of the victims, like most of the perpetrators, belong to the vast black underclass. Rising unemployment (twenty-three per cent nationwide, and two or three times that in the townships) and rising food and fuel prices have led to rising desperation for those chronically excluded from the promises of the new South Africa. The tabloid press and the political demagogues freely blame the social situation on foreigners, and in the last weeks of May more than fifty of them (as well as several South Africans mistaken for foreigners) were killed by the mobs, while more than thirty thousand were driven from their homes, stripped of their possessions, and left to huddle in makeshift camps around churches and police stations or to flee for the borders.

The man in the now iconic photograph was Mozambican; thousands of his compatriots bolted homeward, and the government of Mozambique declared a state of emergency on its frontiers. The great mass of South Africa's foreigners, however, are from Zimbabwe, and for them—some three million people, or a quarter of Zimbabwe's population—repatriation is not an option. They have fled the incessantly escalating hunger, degradation, and violence of President Robert Mugabe's dispensation. In fact, even as they are hounded in the streets of South Africa, more of their compatriots are risking their lives to escape Zimbabwe and join them. In late March, Mugabe, after three decades in power, did not win reëlection—this time, he had failed to rig the vote sufficiently—and in the months since, in preparation for a runoff vote on June 27th, he has unleashed his soldiers and mili-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"Are you sure you used human growth hormone?"

• •

tias to run a campaign of systematic terror against supporters of his rival, Morgan Tsvangirai.

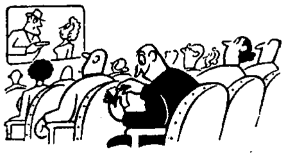
Last year, after Mugabe's torturers battered Tsvangirai almost to death, regional leaders appointed Mbeki to mediate the crisis in Zimbabwe. But Mbeki has been utterly unwilling to show any spine in dealing with Mugabe. On the contrary, he has exhibited a sinister solidarity with his fellow onetime liberation fighter. With strenuous unreality, he has gone so far as to deny that Zimbabwe is in crisis, and he has refused to extend formal refugee status, and the protections that come with it, to millions of the Zimbabweans in his country, lest he insult Mugabe. Mbeki is a lame-duck President, required to step down next year, and he has lost control of the A.N.C. party apparatus to his chief rival, Jacob Zuma. But his coddling of Mugabe has made him complicit in Zimbabwe's devastation. So perhaps there is some justice in the fact that the Zimbabwean crisis he denies threatens to become the defining crisis of his Presidency. After all, the recent mayhem in South Africa only serves Mugabe, creating a distraction as he bleeds Zimbabwe in the final stretch of the election, with forebodings of greater slaughter hanging over the outcome.

It is not obvious what leverage there is on Mugabe. Defiance is his element; he loves to tell the world, "Go to hell." But there is no reason for the world to abide his desire to carry out his crimes unheard and unseen. In April, South African stevedores refused to unload a shipment of seventy-seven tons of rockets, mortars, and other munitions from China destined for Zimbabwe—a cargo reminiscent of the deliveries to Rwanda before the genocide of 1994. And, in deliberate contrast to Mbeki's obliging absence, the American Ambassador to Zimbabwe, James McGee, has been making his presence felt, leading his colleagues in the diplomatic community into the rural areas to investigate and report on the extent of the torture. On a recent excursion, he collected testimonies, notebooks, and photographs that document how Mugabe's goons flay their victims and break their bones. McGee offered this evidence to Mbeki's representatives; they declined to meet with him, and Mugabe threatened him with expulsion. Still, at a time when America's international prestige as an arbiter of political justice carries the stain of Abu Ghraib, it is heartening to see one of our diplomats operating as if he'd never heard that waterboarding and other forms of torture are now his country's policy.

To watch the intertwined agonies of South Africa and Zimbabwe today is to see what Frantz Fanon meant when he wrote, in "The Wretched of the Earth," that "the last battle of the colonized against the colonizer will often be the fight of the colonized against each other." Mbeki and Mugabe belong to a generation of liberation fighters who seem incapable of seeing the world through any lens beyond that of anti-colonial struggle, and who invoke their revolutionary bona fides as immunity against all political criticism and all challengers. Their time has passed. The best hope for both their countries now is for the voters of Zimbabwe to be allowed to show their courage on June 27th and liberate themselves.

—*Philip Gourevitch*

THE ACADEMY
GOOMBAH 101



Over Memorial Day weekend, fittingly, Fordham University hosted a conference called "The Sopranos: A Wake." Among the papers were "'Blabbermouth Cunts': 'The Sopranos' and the Feminist Dilemma," "A 'Finook' in the Crew: Vito Spatafore, 'The Sopranos,' and the Queering of the Mob Genre," and "Slouching Toward Jersey: 'The Sopranos' and Yeats." David Lavery, a television scholar, called the show "an excellent example of a Bakhtinian dialogical text." Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, of Manchester Metropolitan University, in England, discussed Carmela's collusion with the patriarchy and their consequent struggle "to deconstruct our attraction to her"—a project that had occupied them for seven years. While these people were sober academics, they were also "Sopranos" freaks. When a presenter quoted an unremarkable line from one episode of this eight-year series—Tony saying, of a gorilla, that it "could maul you into ten pieces"—he was corrected by an audience member: "It's 'could *innocently* maul you into ten pieces.' "

The most compelling presentations were not by the theorists but by other kinds of expert. Dianna Rivers, a professor of nursing from Texas, discussed the financial difficulties that Tony's men, not employed by the kind of organiza-

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tion that offers Blue Cross, faced as a result of their frequent hospitalizations. Philip Scala, a retired F.B.I. agent, said that the ritual by which Christopher was "made" was entirely accurate, down to the burning of the saint's picture, but that, as part of the lowering of standards so often deplored by Tony, the DeCavalcante family, said to be the model for Tony's crew, had abandoned the ceremony: "They would just have a pizza party and say, 'You're made.' " (This caused other families to disrespect them.) Two brave men involved in Mafia cleanups in Sicily—Fabio Licata, a judge, and Antonio Ingroia, a prosecutor—reported that "The Sopranos" never caught on with Italians. "They didn't understand how a Mafia boss could have psychological problems," Ingroia said.

The best session was an interview with Dominic Chianese, or Uncle Junior, who is much handsomer without those enormous glasses which the costumers made him wear, obviously to reveal his gift for acting with his eyes. Chianese discussed the scene in which Uncle Junior smashes a pie in his girlfriend's face: "They must have tried out twelve different kinds of pie to get the one that would stick right, on the face. I said, 'You're going to end up using custard, because that's what they did in vaudeville.' They said, 'No, let's try something else.' This poor apprentice, he volunteered, and they mashed the pies in his face one by one—coconut, custard, chocolate. Of course, they ended up using the custard." Asked whether Junior was really senile, or just faking, when he shot Tony, Chianese said that he didn't know but that he had played it senile: "You don't hide in the bottom of a closet unless you're losing it." David Chase, the show's creator, had told him to interpret the scene as he wanted to. Chianese insisted, however, that neither he nor anyone else in the cast ever strayed from the script: "To me, those lines were like Shakespeare." Chianese said that he was embarrassed by the many curse words he had to utter on the show, and he reported that his Aunt Rose would turn off the volume on the TV when he appeared.

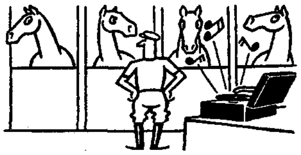
The conference ended with a four-hour bus trip to "Sopranos" locations in New Jersey. The participants viewed the church where Carmela saw Father Phil making nice with Rosalie Aprile, and the trash can in which she thereupon dumped the dish of ziti she was bringing him. They gazed at the Pulaski Skyway, from which Tony threw the painting of the Rat Pack into the Hackensack River. "The painting wouldn't fall right," the tour guide, Gary Mahmoud, said. "They had to do ten takes. They would fish the painting out and do it again." The last stop was Satin Dolls, a strip club in Lodi that was the set for Bada Bing, Tony's headquarters. How magical it was, to walk into the Bing. To those who, for years, had watched the weary breasts of the Bing's pole dancers bobbing up and down behind Tony as he plied his trade, it was disappointing to find that Satin Dolls' dancers wore bras, but Mahmoud explained that in New Jersey such establishments are allowed to have either nudity or a liquor license—the "booze-or-boobs law."

Between stops, Mahmoud gave quizzes. What did Tony say when Dr. Melfi asked him if he had ever had a prostate exam? "Hey, I don't even let anybody wag their finger in my *face*."

—*Joan Acocella*

THE RACETRACK

LUCKY PEOPLE



It can be disconcerting to see people go nuts over a euthanized racehorse when the world is falling to pieces and human beings are dying in droves, but a living racehorse—a thriving champion, a supercolt in his prime—is another thing, as good an excuse as any for a little hysteria and wonderment. After Big Brown won the Preakness Stakes, last month, a television reporter asked Rick Dutrow, Big Brown's trainer, about his horse, and Dutrow, near tears, said, "Anybody that has ever touched him, seen him, had anything to do with him, are the luckiest people in the world."

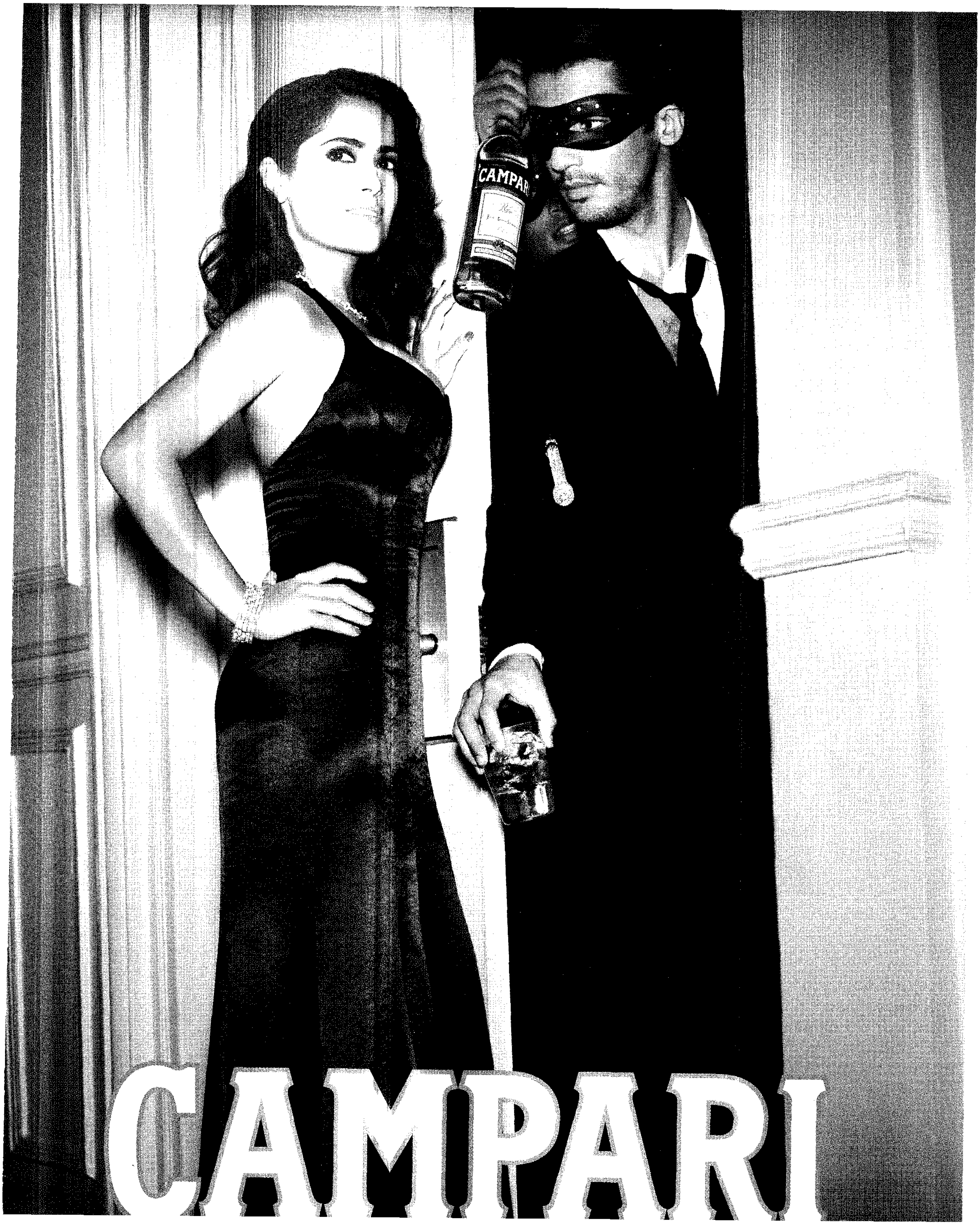
With this in mind, pilgrims have been contriving visits to Big Brown at Belmont, since he arrived there from Baltimore, a couple of weeks ago, and began preparing for the Belmont Stakes, which will be run on Saturday. If he wins, he will be the first Triple Crown winner in thirty years. With his magical stride, his dominating victories at the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness, and the apparent correlation between Triple Crown years (1978, 1977, 1973, etc.) and periods of American disillusionment (ibid.), it would seem that he's got an excellent shot.

Big Brown, during his New York engagement, is staying at the trainer Bobby Frankel's barn near the track, in a verdant, ramshackle settlement that brings to mind an abandoned military base. Frankel, who was a friend of Dutrow's father, the late trainer Dick Dutrow, has lent Big Brown Stall 8. The barn is open to the air. Pigeons, songbirds, and squirrels scuttle about; pots of petunias and impatiens hang from the eaves. Stable-hands muck the stalls and chop carrot chunks into bowls of oats. The only sign of the presence of a star athlete is a security guard in a chair.

Last Tuesday afternoon, Dutrow stood facing Big Brown's stall, just looking at him. Dutrow, who is forty-eight and has swept-back gray hair, had on a polo shirt, cargo shorts, deck shoes, and wraparound sunglasses. Big Brown, who is three and, being a bay, is reddish-brown but black at "the points" (ears, nose, tail, etc.), had on a halter. Early that morning, he had had a good run, despite a small crack in his left-front hoof. Dutrow, looking into his eyes now, liked what he saw.

"He's a sweetheart," Dutrow said. "You gotta see what I see." What a novice could see was that, while the other horses just nibbled at the hay bales hanging outside their stalls, Big Brown tore off huge chunks. "He's a cool horse," Dutrow went on. "I'm just lucky to have him." Dutrow, a decade ago, was living in a barn at Aqueduct, broke, recovering from a drug problem, estranged from his father, and mourning the murder, in a robbery, of the mother of his daughter. Now, give or take the occasional all-nighter, he has settled down; he lives in Oyster Bay, drives a Mercedes, and trains about a hundred horses.

Big Brown's exercise rider, Michelle Nevin, an Irishwoman who came to work for Dutrow after dating him, arrived to give the horse a walk. She led him out of his stall. Whoever was around stood aside, and stood still. The feeling of watching him pass by was a little like that of seeing a President up close, if that President were a grizzly bear in a short skirt and high heels. Power, celebrity, menace, gams. "Let's walk down to the end here, babe," Dutrow said softly. After one lap, the


CAMPARI
CAMPARI

horse approached, hooves disappearing in the dirt. "He stops a lot," Dutrow said. "Watch, he'll stop when he gets to us." He did. He stood there awhile, eying the novice, flaring his nostrils, and baring his teeth, in an incongruous, Mister Ed kind of way. Then he moved along. On his next lap, he stopped again. "Wanna touch him?" Dutrow asked. "Go ahead." The nose was soft, as horses' noses are. Hot breath, dried snot, flashing black eyes. A neck like steel and suède. Holy Moses.

While Big Brown did a few more laps, Dutrow made some phone calls ("Scuderi, I'm gonna stop by Aqueduct, go to Don Pepe's. You in?"). You could see some thunderheads through the trees, but Dutrow remarked that storms didn't bother Big Brown: "Only thing I've ever seen bother him was at the Florida Derby, when they tried to put a blanket of roses over his neck. He did not like that."

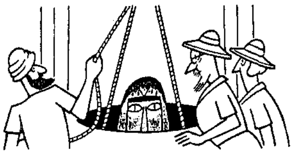
Big Brown

A man came by with a note from a little girl and asked if she could have her photograph taken with Big Brown. "I can't say no to the people," Dutrow said. Big Brown posed with the little girl, undeterred by the flash of her mother's camera.

"We're all finished up here, babe," Dutrow said. The novice wanted to touch the horse again, wish him luck. This time, Big Brown jerked his head and snapped his teeth. "Watch it, he's gonna bite you," Dutrow said. Why? "Well, he might not like you."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

THE PICTURES
DIGGING



Last week's news that "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" had won one of Hollywood's most coveted prizes—the Memorial Day-weekend box-office—sent shivers through the offices of *Archaeology*, a magazine of the Archaeological Institute of America. (The organization recently elected Harrison Ford to its board of directors.) "O.K., fine, the movie romanticizes what we do," Eric Powell, one of the magazine's editors, said recently. "Indy may be a horrible archeologist, but he's a great diplomat for archeology. I think we'll see a spike in kids who want to become archeologists."

The magazine had recently published its May/June issue, which includes the "Indy Spirit Awards," a catalogue of those archeologists who best exemplify Dr. Jones's spirit (e.g., Nels Nelson, 1875-1964: "When beset by outlaws in Mongolia, he brandished his glass eye at the brigands, who quickly fled"). Last Tuesday, Powell organized an expedition: a matinée in Long Island City, followed by lunch, where the archeologists would do what archeologists do best—scrutinize their findings.

The group sat in the fourth row of the theatre. They passed around a tub of popcorn, snickering at Indy's bravado ("If you want to be a good archeologist, you've got to get out of the library") and recoiling at his crude excavation techniques. Later, over dolmades and Mythos beer at S'Agapo Taverna, they elaborated. "Those tombs!" Samir Patel, an associate editor, began. "That's an awfully exposed site not to have been hit by looters."

"Looters?" Ken Feisel, the magazine's design director, replied. "Indiana Jones himself is nothing but a stinking looter!"

Powell joined in: "I loved that technique at the temple. Bang, bang, bang with a rock until the pieces fall off. Oh, that just makes you cringe. And when he cuts into the mummies? I was begging, Please, please do not do that."

Soon, the conversation had turned toward stories of Indiana Jones-ish exploits. "I guess it was in the seventies," Malin Banyasz, an editorial assistant, said. "I was in Israel, working on this big dig, and one of the guys sort of looked up at me funny and then whispered, 'Move just a tiny bit this way.' And that's when I noticed a huge scorpion about to crawl up my leg. I moved, and then with his little hatchet"—Banyasz made a hacking motion—"he sliced up the scorpion."

"West Texas," Powell said. "Rattlesnakes all around. You could always hear them approaching because their tails would shake. But then one time, when I was walking over a site, I looked down and right between my legs was this huge rattlesnake. The end of his tail was flying back and forth, but there wasn't any sound. I looked closely, and then I saw that his rattle had somehow been chewed off. So I froze, staring him down, just like the cobra scene in 'Raiders of the Lost Ark.' "

Feisel interrupted. "Listen," he said, "archeology is really, really boring." He went on, "I've been on only one dig, and where was it? In Secaucus, New Jersey, directly underneath the New Jersey Turnpike. Some guy had been researching where his grandfather should've been buried and figured out it was in this potter's field beneath the turnpike. Turns out the government had known all about it. Later, they couldn't excavate all the bodies, because moving them would've interfered with the structural support of the overpass. These bodies were basically holding up the turnpike."

A few more gulps of beer, and the group found its way back to "The Crystal Skull" and, in particular, to what the *Archaeology* colleagues were calling "the treasure chamber"—a room full of artifacts unearthed near the movie's climax, a sand sifter's Shangri-La. The group had discerned several Chinese terra-cotta warriors from 210 B.C., a statue from King Tut's tomb, and—why not?—a few Buddhas.

"I bet that if you could pause it you could figure out exactly what each artifact is," Zach Zorich, an associate editor, said.

"You'd need a frame-by-frame still to do it," Powell said.

Someone suggested bringing a cell phone to capture the images.

"Who's a big enough nerd to do that?" Feisel asked. Silence. "What I mean is, who's a big enough nerd not sitting at this table?"

—*Mike Peed*

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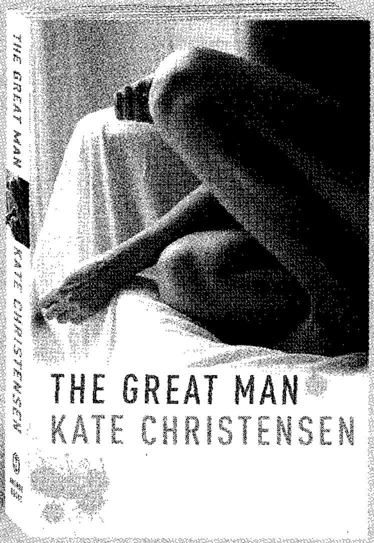
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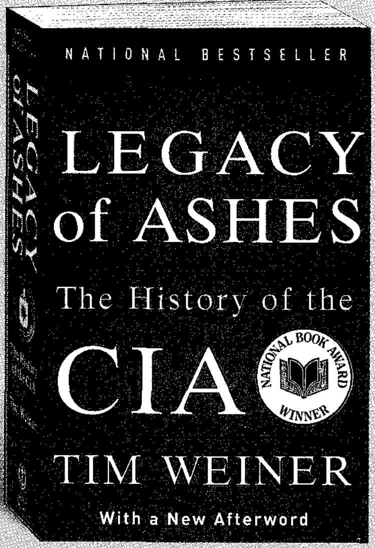
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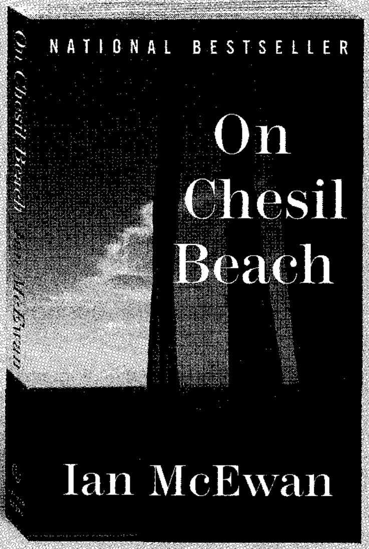
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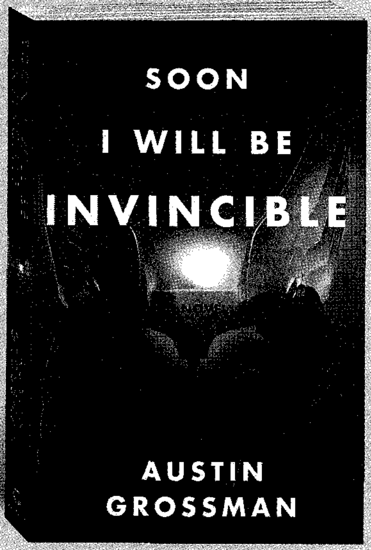
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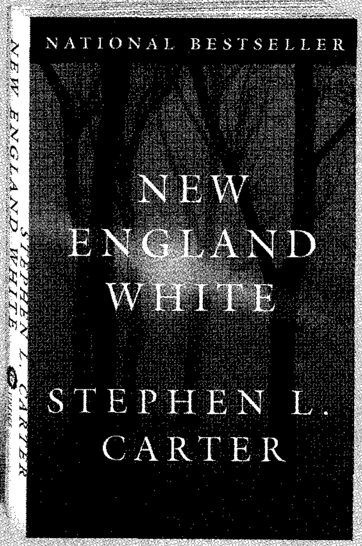
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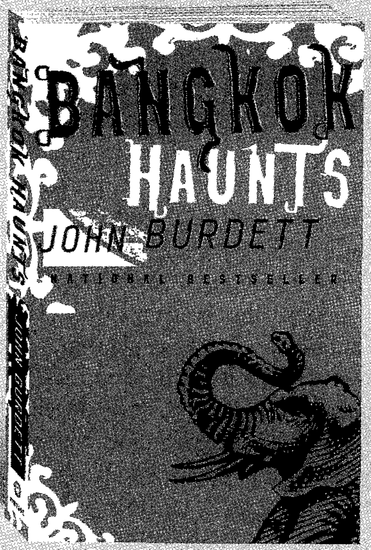
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ANCHOR

VINTAGE

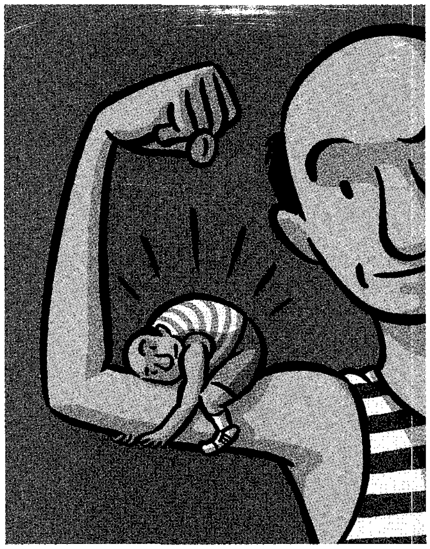
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
ALL TOGETHER NOW?

These aren't great times for CBS. It's no longer the network ratings champ; its radio business is dragging; and a recessionary economy is bad news for a company dependent on advertising revenue. So it isn't exactly surprising that the company felt it needed to do something dramatic. What's surprising is that it has chosen to shell out almost two billion dollars to buy CNET Networks, a venerable but not very profitable Internet company. Both companies' executives promised that the deal made perfect strategic sense. It turns CBS into a "top-ten presence" on the Net, giving it access to those eighteen-to-thirty-four-year-olds whom advertisers love, and it allows for cross-promotional opportunities across myriad media. CNET's C.E.O., Neil Ashe, claimed that it will make the two companies "bigger, bolder, and better than we could be apart."

That's what they all say. In fact, corporate marriages only rarely end in bliss—many studies have found that most mergers and acquisitions do little for the acquiring company's bottom line. A KPMG study of seven hundred mergers found that only seventeen per cent created real value, and that more than half destroyed it. And a McKinsey study of mergers that took place in the nineteen-nineties found that less than a quarter generated excess returns on investment. Perhaps CBS's experience will be different, but shareholders clearly don't think so. The day the deal was announced, the company's stock price fell by almost two and a half per cent.

Investors are right to be skeptical. To begin with, the logic of the deal depends on the myth of synergy, an idea that appeals to executives' sense of themselves as magic-workers. As Warren Buffett once put it, executives see the companies they acquire as handsome princes imprisoned in toads' bodies, awaiting only the "managerial kiss" to set them free. Unfortunately, most toads turn out to be as warty as they look, and magic kisses are harder to bestow than executives think. Only a few companies today—G.E. and Cisco come to mind—have been consistently able to take acquired firms and improve their performance and profitability.

Merger mania also rests on what you might call the fallacy of ownership—the assumption that you have to own a company to make money from its properties. In fact, much of what mergers are supposed to accomplish can be achieved through partnerships and alliances. Google has made deals to handle searches and advertising for companies like A.O.L. and I.A.C., giving it access to their customers without the hassle of an acquisition. And I.B.M. has, in recent years, marketed the products of its competitors Sun Microsystems and Novell, enabling it to expand its offerings and its potential customer base. If CBS and CNET had simply agreed to cross-promote each other's brands and distribute each other's content, CBS would have had many of the benefits of merging without the costs.



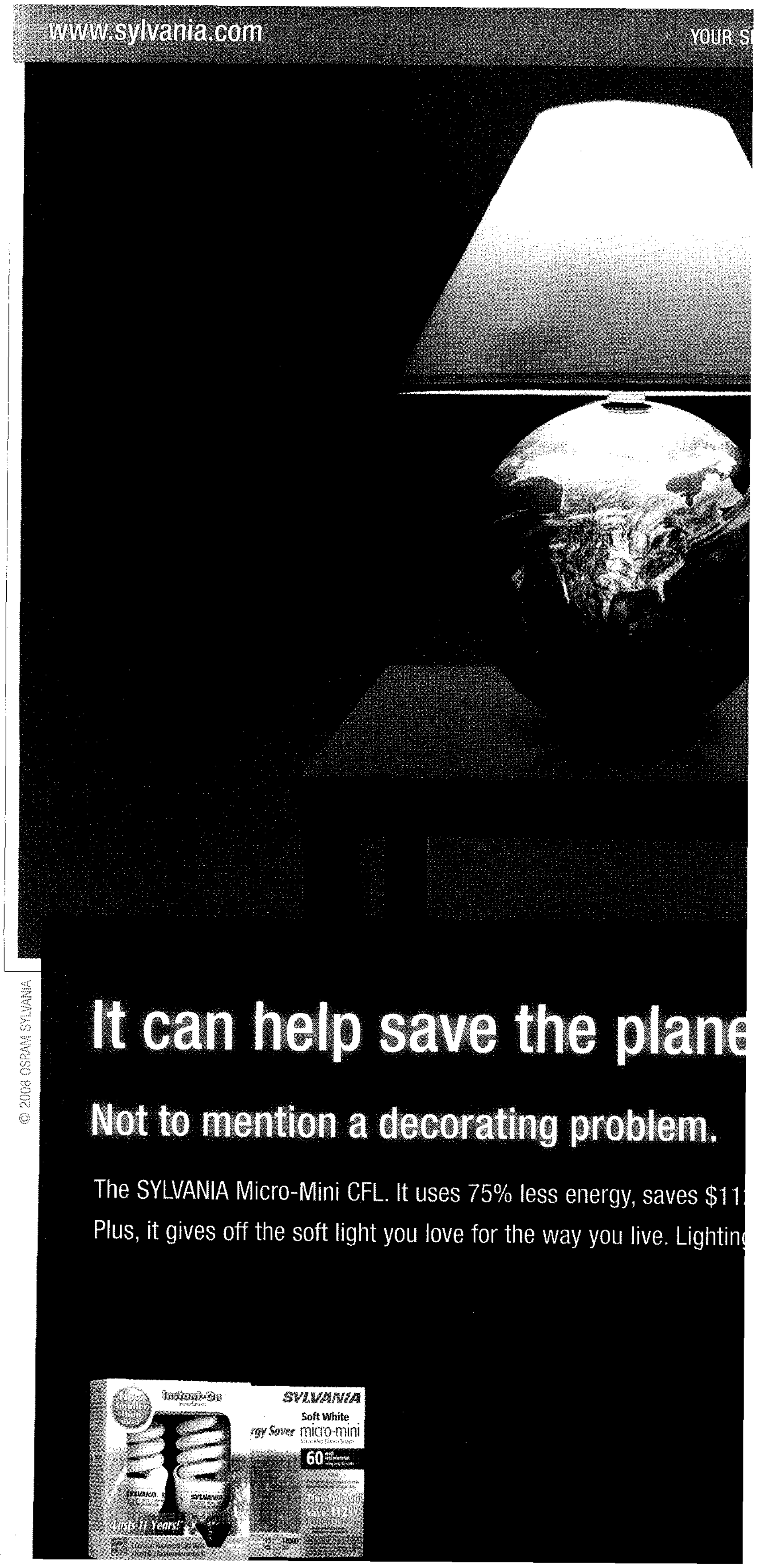
There are, of course, situations in which acquisitions do make sense. According to a recent meta-analysis of a number of merger studies, mergers that rely more on cost-cutting—combining back-office operations, eliminating redundancies, and so on—than on promises of vast growth are more likely to be successful. (The merger of J. P. Morgan and Bank One, for instance, led to more than three billion dollars in annual cost savings.) Acquisitions of smaller, younger private companies are usually wiser than acquisitions of publicly traded firms. They're more likely to give you access to new technologies or products, and you're more likely to be able to make the deal at a good price. In 2000, for instance, Microsoft paid less than forty million dollars to buy the video-game developer Bungie, the creator of Halo. In the six years that Microsoft owned the company, Bungie's products generated well over a billion dollars in revenue for Microsoft. When you buy a publicly traded company, by contrast, you typically have to pay a steep takeover premium. And that matters, because, arguably, the best hope of making an acquisition work is doing the deal at a bargain price.

Unfortunately, the CBS-CNET merger fits none of the criteria for a good deal. The overlap between the two companies is limited, and so are the opportunities for cost-cutting. And, because CNET is neither small nor privately owned, CBS paid a forty-five-per-cent premium on CNET's stock-market price. That means that, for the deal to work, it will need to improve CNET's performance not by a little but by a lot. Rationally speaking, then, it's unlikely that this deal will end up making CBS money. But the deal was not driven solely by that consideration. CBS is also trying to fight the perception that its business is slowly fading away. This isn't unusual. C.E.O.s of public companies often feel what you might call the "grow or die" imperative—if the company isn't growing briskly, they worry, investors will abandon it in search of better opportunities. This fear often has a basis in reality—Wall Street analysts, for instance, have been pressing CBS to do something to revitalize the company—and C.E.O.s should worry about increasing shareholder value. But while acquisitions, almost by definition, boost a company's growth rate, they too often make it bigger without making it better.

It's the rare C.E.O., of course, who's comfortable presiding over a shrinking empire, and running a public company creates a bias toward action, if only as a way of convincing investors that you recognize your problems and are dealing with them. But history suggests that, when it comes to mergers, the best response is often to just say no. In effect, deals like the CNET acquisition are a bit like an aging outfielder taking steroids in order to stave off the boobirds. The difference is that steroids usually work.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN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FICTION

NATASHA

BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV

BASTIENNE SCHMIDT, "EMBROIDERY" (2007)

On the stairs Natasha ran into her neighbor from across the hall, Baron Wolfe. He was somewhat laboriously ascending the bare wooden steps, caressing the bannister with his hand and whistling softly through his teeth.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry, Natasha?"

"To the drugstore to get a prescription filled. The doctor was just here. Father is better."

"Ah, that's good news."

She flitted past in her rustling raincoat, hatless.

Leaning over the bannister, Wolfe glanced back at her. For an instant he caught sight from overhead of the sleek, girlish part in her hair. Still whistling, he climbed to the top floor, threw his rain-soaked briefcase on the bed, then thoroughly and satisfyingly washed and dried his hands.

Then he knocked on old Khrenov's door.

Khrenov lived in the room across the hall with his daughter, who slept on a couch, a couch with amazing springs that rolled and swelled like metal tussocks through the flabby plush. There was also a table, unpainted and covered with ink-spotted newspapers. Sick Khrenov, a shrivelled old man in a nightshirt that reached to his heels, creakily darted back into bed and pulled up the sheet just as Wolfe's large shaved head poked through the door.

"Come in, glad to see you, come on in."

The old man was breathing with difficulty, and the door of his night table remained half open.

"I hear you've almost totally recovered, Alexey Ivanych," Baron Wolfe said, seating himself by the bed and slapping his knees.

Khrenov offered his yellow, sticky hand and shook his head.

"I don't know what you've been hearing, but I do know perfectly well that I'll die tomorrow."

He made a popping sound with his lips.

"Nonsense," Wolfe merrily interrupted, and extracted from his hip pocket an enormous silver cigar case. "Mind if I smoke?"

He fiddled for a long time with his lighter, clicking its cogged screw. Khrenov half-closed his eyes. His eyelids were bluish, like a frog's webbing. Graying bristles covered his protruding chin. Without opening his eyes, he said, "That's how it'll be. They killed my two sons and heaved me and Natasha out of our natal nest. Now we're supposed to go and die in a strange city. How stupid, all things considered. . . ."

Wolfe started speaking loudly and distinctly. He spoke of how Khrenov still had a long time to live, thank goodness, and how everyone would be returning to Russia in the spring, together with the storks. And then he proceeded to recount an incident from his past.

"It was back when I was wandering

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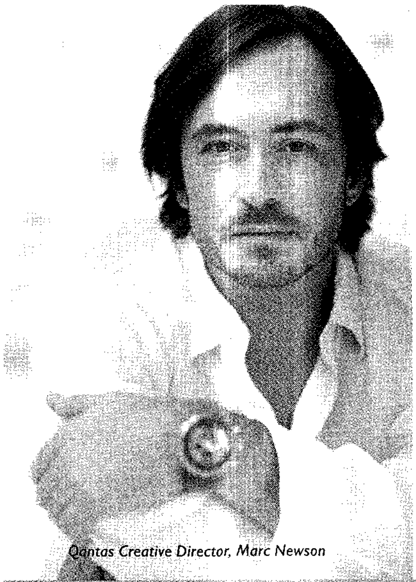

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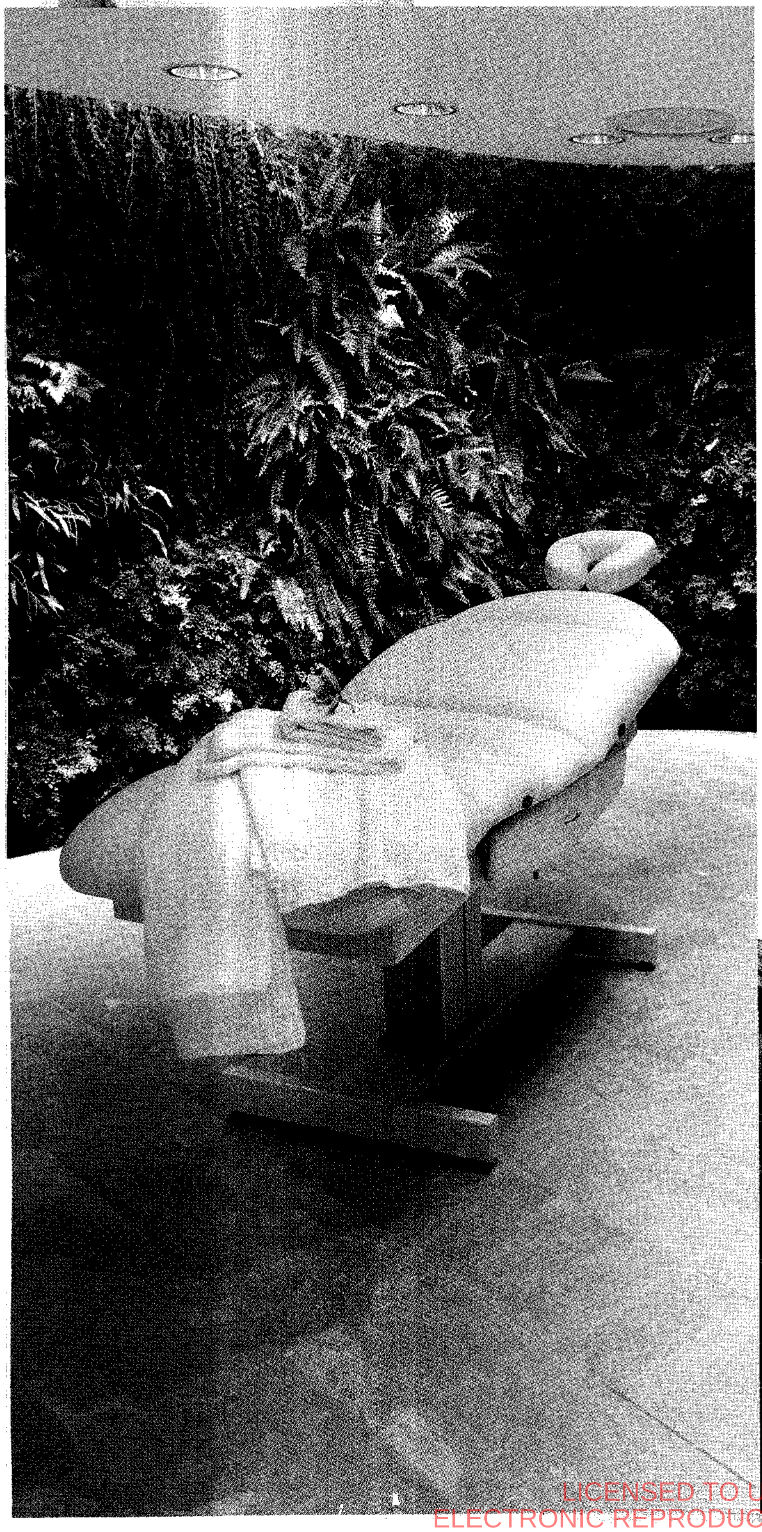

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around the Congo," he was saying, and his large, somewhat corpulent figure swayed slightly. "Ah, the distant Congo, my dear Alexey Ivanych, such distant wilds—you know . . . Imagine a village in the woods, women with pendulous breasts, and the shimmer of water, black as karakul, amid the huts. There, under a gigantic tree—a *kiroku*—lay orange fruit like rubber balls, and at night there came from inside the trunk what seemed like the sound of the sea. I had a long chat with the local kinglet. Our translator was a Belgian engineer, another curious man. He swore, by the way, that, in 1895, he had seen an ichthyosaur in the swamps not far from Tanganyika. The kinglet was smeared with cobalt, adorned with rings, and blubbery, with a belly like jelly. Here's what happened—"

Wolfe, relishing his story, smiled and stroked his pale-blue head.

"Natasha is back," Khrenov quietly and firmly interjected, without raising his eyelids.

Instantly turning pink, Wolfe looked around. A moment later, somewhere far off, the lock of the front door clinked, then steps rustled along the hall. Natasha entered quickly, with radiant eyes.

"How are you, Daddy?"

Wolfe got up and said, with feigned nonchalance, "Your father is perfectly well, and I have no idea why he's in bed. . . . I'm going to tell him about a certain African sorcerer."

Natasha smiled at her father and began unwrapping the medicine.

"It's raining," she said softly. "The weather is terrible."

As usually happens when the weather is mentioned, the others looked out the window. That made a bluish-gray vein on Khrenov's neck contract. Then he threw his head back on the pillow again. With a pout, Natasha counted the drops, and her eyelashes kept time. Her sleek dark hair was beaded with rain, and under her eyes there were adorable blue shadows.

II

Back in his room, Wolfe paced for a long time, with a flustered and happy smile, dropping heavily now into an armchair, now onto the edge of the bed. Then, for some reason, he opened a window and peered into the dark, gurgling courtyard below. At last he shrugged one shoulder spasmodically, put on his green hat, and went out.

Old Khrenov, who was sitting slumped on the couch while Natasha straightened his bed for the night, observed indifferently, in a low voice, "Wolfe has gone out to dinner."

Then he sighed and pulled the blanket more tightly around him.

"Ready," Natasha said. "Climb back in, Daddy."

All around there was the wet evening city, the black torrents of the streets, the mobile, shiny cupolas of umbrellas, the blaze of shopwindows trickling down onto the asphalt. Along with the rain the night began to flow, filling the depths of the courtyards, flickering in the eyes of the thin-legged prostitutes, who slowly strolled to and fro at the crowded intersections. And, somewhere above, the circular lights of an advertisement flashed intermittently like a spinning illuminated wheel.

Toward nightfall, Khrenov's temperature had risen. The thermometer was warm, alive—the column of mercury climbed high on the little red ladder. For a long time he muttered unintelligibly, kept biting his lips and gently shaking his head. Then he fell asleep. Natasha undressed by a candle's wan flame, and saw her reflection in the murky glass of the window—her pale, thin neck, the dark braid that had fallen across her clavicle. She stood like that, in motionless languor, and suddenly it seemed to her that the room, together with the couch, the table littered with cigarette stubs, the bed on which, with open mouth, a sharp-nosed, sweaty old man slept restlessly—all this started to move, and was now floating, like the deck of a ship, into the black night. She sighed, ran a hand across her warm bare shoulder, and, transported partly by dizziness, lowered herself onto the couch. Then, with a vague smile, she began rolling down and pulling off her old, oft-mended stockings. Once again the room started floating, and she felt as if someone were blowing hot air onto the back of her head. She opened her eyes wide—dark, elongated eyes, whose whites had a bluish sheen. An autumn fly began to circle the candle and, like a buzzing black pea, collided with the wall. Natasha slowly crawled under the blanket and stretched, sensing, like a bystander, the warmth of her own body, her long thighs,

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"Would you mind making room? My reading group is here."

• •

and her bare arms thrown back behind her head. She felt too lazy to douse the candle, to shoo away the silken formication that was making her involuntarily compress her knees and shut her eyes. Khrenov gave a deep groan and raised one arm in his sleep. The arm fell back as if it were dead. Natasha lifted herself slightly and blew toward the candle. Multicolored circles started to swim before her eyes.

I feel so wonderful, she thought, laughing into her pillow. She was now lying curled up, and seemed to herself to be incredibly small, and all the thoughts in her head were like warm sparks that were gently scattering and sliding. She was just falling asleep when her torpor was shattered by a deep, frenzied cry.

"Daddy, what's the matter?"

She fumbled on the table and lit the candle.

Khrenov was sitting up in bed, breathing furiously, his fingers clutching the collar of his shirt. A few minutes earlier, he had awakened and was frozen with horror, having mistaken the luminous dial of the watch lying on a chair nearby for the muzzle of a rifle motionlessly aiming at him. He had awaited the gunshot, not daring to stir, then, losing control, started screaming. Now he looked at his daughter, blinking and smiling a tremulous smile.

"Daddy, calm down, it's nothing. . . ."

Her naked feet softly shuffling on the floor, she straightened his pillows and touched his brow, which was sticky and cold with sweat. With a deep sigh, and still shaken by spasms, he turned toward the wall and muttered, "All of them, all . . . and me, too. It's a nightmare. . . . No, you mustn't."

He fell asleep as if falling into an abyss.

Natasha lay down again. The couch had become even bumpier, the springs pressed now into her side, now into her shoulder blades, but at last she got comfortable and floated back into the interrupted, incredibly warm dream that she still sensed but no longer remembered. Then, at dawn, she awoke again. Her father was calling to her.

"Natasha, I don't feel well. Give me some water."

Slightly unsteady, her somnolence permeated by the light-blue dawn, she moved toward the washbasin, making the pitcher clink. Khrenov drank avidly and deeply. He said, "It will be awful if I never return."

"Go to sleep, Daddy. Try to get some more sleep."

Natasha threw on her flannel robe and sat down at the foot of her father's bed. He repeated the words "This is awful" several times, then gave a frightened smile.

"Natasha, I keep imagining that I am walking through our village. Remember the place by the river, near the sawmill? And it's hard to walk. You know—all the sawdust. Sawdust and sand. My feet sink in. It tickles. One time, when we travelled abroad . . ." He frowned, struggling to follow the course of his own stumbling thoughts.

Natasha recalled with extraordinary clarity how he had looked then, recalled his fair little beard, his gray suède gloves, his checkered travelling cap that resembled a rubber pouch for a sponge—and suddenly felt that she was about to cry.

"Yes. So that's that," Khrenov drawled indifferently, peering into the dawn mist.

"Sleep some more, Daddy. I remember everything."

He awkwardly took a swallow of water, rubbed his face, and leaned back on the pillows. From the courtyard came a cock's sweet throbbing cry.

III

At about eleven the next morning, Wolfe knocked on the Khrenovs' door. Some dishes tinkled with fright in the room, and Natasha's laughter spilled forth. An instant later, she slipped out into the hall, carefully closing the door behind her.

"I'm so glad—Father is a lot better today."

She was wearing a white blouse and a beige skirt with buttons along the hips. Her elongated, shiny eyes were happy.

"Awfully restless night," she continued rapidly, "and now he's cooled down completely. His temperature is normal. He has even decided to get up. They've just bathed him."

"It's sunny out today," Wolfe said mysteriously. "I didn't go to work."

They were standing in the half-lit hall, leaning against the wall, not knowing what else to talk about.

"You know what, Natasha?" Wolfe suddenly ventured, pushing his broad, soft back away from the wall and thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his wrinkled gray trousers. "Let's take a trip to the country today. We'll be back by six. What do you say?"

Natasha stood with one shoulder

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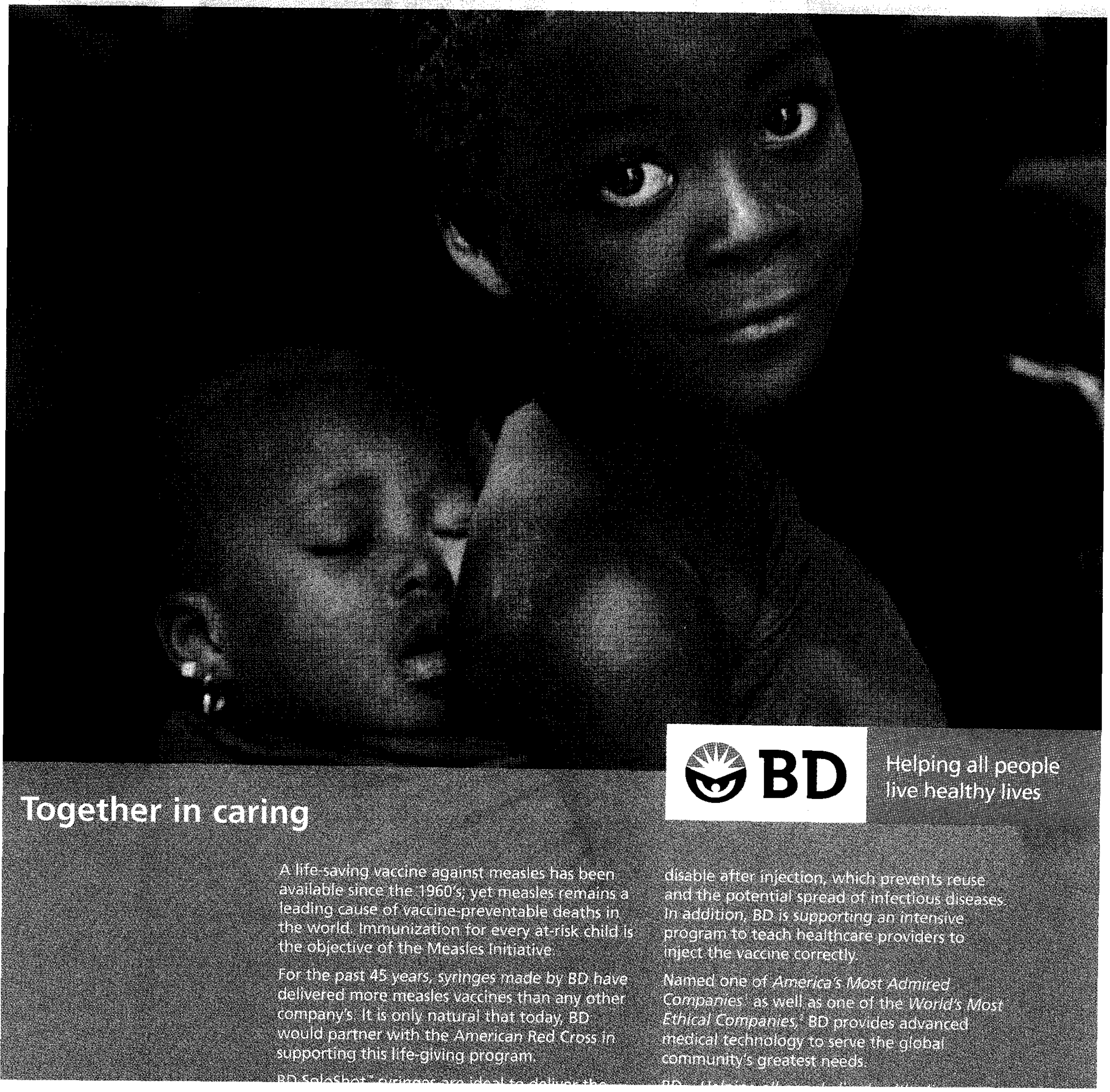

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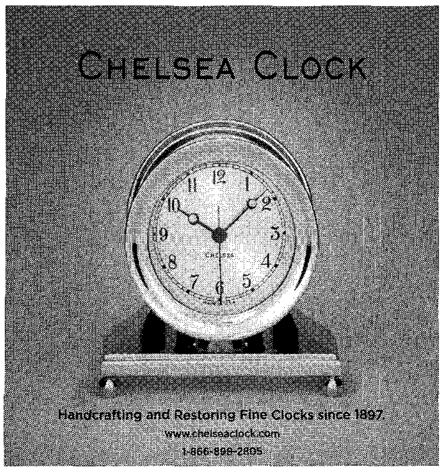

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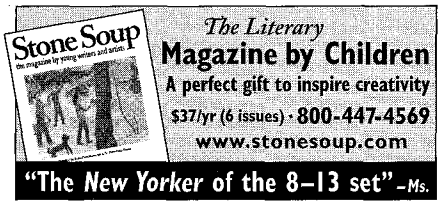
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pressed against the wall, also pushing away slightly.

"How can I leave Father alone? Still, though . . ."

Wolfe suddenly cheered up.

"Natasha, sweetheart, come on—please. Your dad is all right today, isn't he? And the landlady is nearby in case he needs anything."

"Yes, that's true," Natasha said slowly. "I'll tell him."

And, with a flip of her skirt, she turned back into the room.

Fully dressed but without his shirt collar, Khrenov was feebly groping for something on the table.

"Natasha, Natasha, you forgot to buy the papers yesterday. . . ."

Natasha busied herself brewing some tea on the alcohol stove.

"Daddy, today I'd like to take a trip to the country. Wolfe invited me."

"Of course, darling, you must go," Khrenov said, and the bluish whites of his eyes filled with tears. "Believe me, I'm better today. If only it weren't for this ridiculous weakness . . ."

When Natasha had left he again started slowly groping about the room, still searching for something . . . With a soft grunt he tried to move the couch. Then he looked under it—he lay prone on the floor, and stayed there, his head spinning nauseatingly. Slowly, laboriously, he got back on his feet, struggled over to his bed, lay down . . . And again he had the sensation that he was crossing some bridge, that he could hear the sound of a lumber mill, that yellow tree trunks were floating, that his feet were sinking deep into the moist sawdust, that a cool wind was blowing from the river, chilling him through and through. . . .

IV

"Yes—all my travels . . . Oh, Natasha, I sometimes felt like a god. I saw the Palace of Shadows in Ceylon and shot at tiny emerald birds in Madagascar. The natives there wear necklaces made of vertebrae, and sing so strangely at night on the seashore, as if they were musical jackals. I lived in a tent not far from Tamatave, where the earth is red, and the sea dark blue. I cannot describe that sea to you."

Wolfe fell silent, gently tossing a pinecone with his hand. Then he ran his puffy palm down the length of his face and broke out laughing.

"And here I am, penniless, stuck in the most miserable of European cities, sitting in an office day in, day out, like some idler, munching on bread and sausage at night in a truckers' dive. Yet there was a time . . ."

Natasha was lying on her stomach, elbows widespread, watching the brightly lit tops of the pines as they gently receded into the turquoise heights. As she peered into this sky, luminous round dots circled, shimmered, and scattered in her eyes. Every so often something would flit like a golden spasm from pine to pine. Next to her crossed legs sat Baron Wolfe in his ample gray suit, his shaved head bent, still tossing his dry cone.

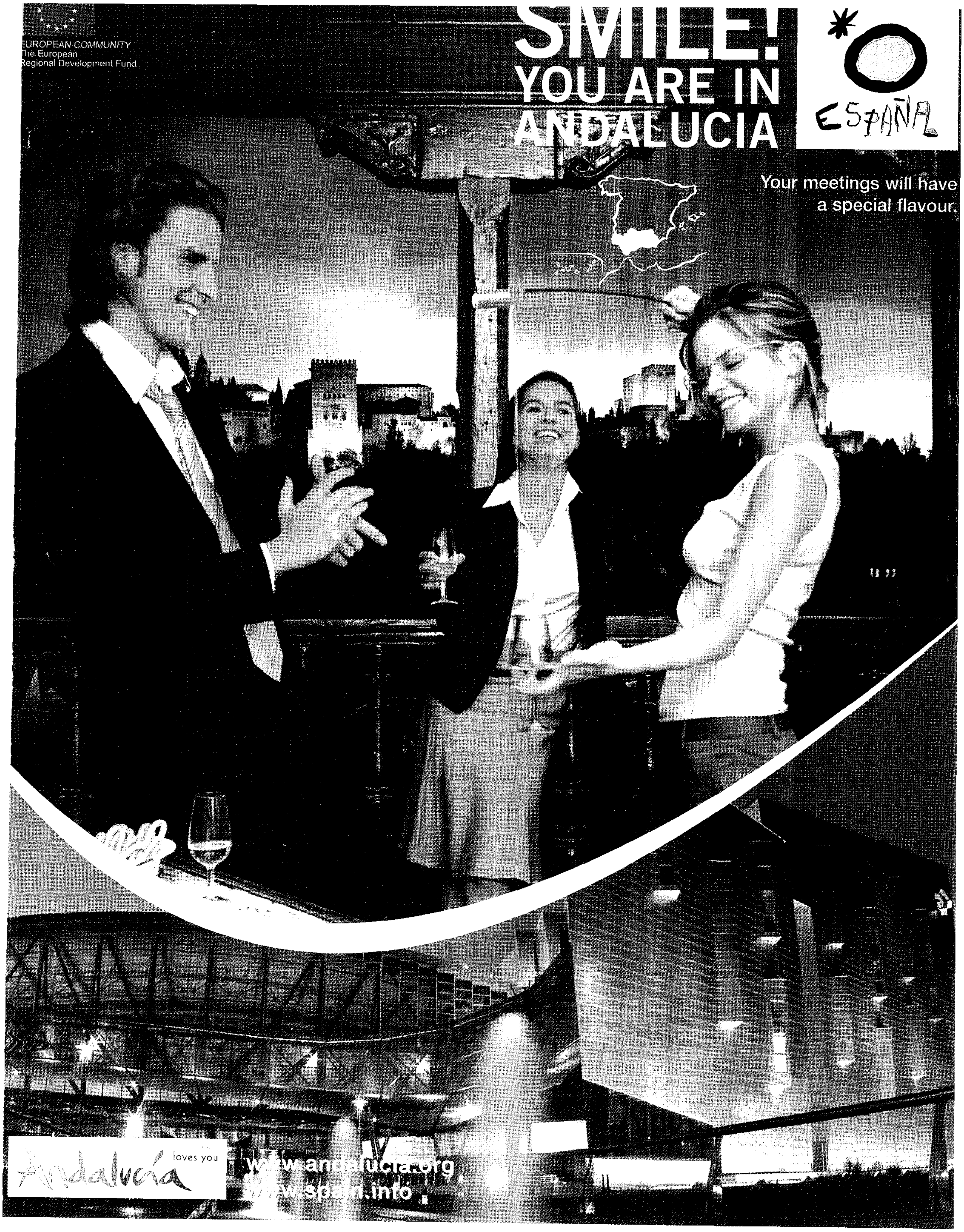
Natasha sighed.

"In the Middle Ages," she said, gazing at the tops of the pines, "they would have burned me at the stake or sanctified me. I sometimes have strange sensations. Like a kind of ecstasy. Then I become almost weightless, I feel I'm floating somewhere, and I understand everything—life, death, everything. . . . Once, when I was about ten, I was sitting in the dining room, drawing something. Then I got tired and started thinking. Suddenly, very rapidly, in came a woman, barefoot, wearing faded blue garments, with a large, heavy belly, and her face was small, thin, and yellow, with extraordinarily gentle, extraordinarily mysterious eyes. . . . Without looking at me, she hurried past and disappeared into the next room. I was not frightened—for some reason, I thought she had come to wash the floors. I never encountered that woman again, but you know who she was? The Virgin Mary . . ."

Wolfe smiled.

"What makes you think that, Natasha?"

"I know. She appeared to me in a dream five years later. She was holding a child, and at her feet there were cherubs propped on their elbows, just like in the Raphael painting, only they were alive. Besides that, I sometimes have other, very little visions. When they took Father away in Moscow and I remained alone in the house, here's what happened: On the desk there was a small bronze bell like the ones they put on cows in the Tyrol. Suddenly it rose into the air, started tinkling, and then fell. What a marvellous, pure sound."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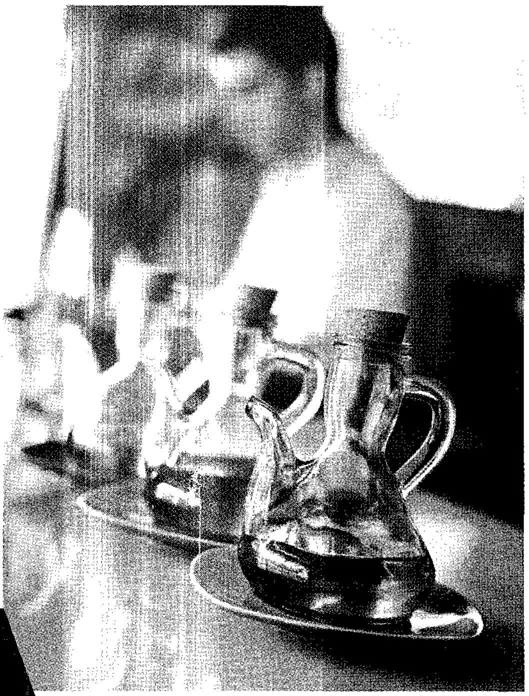

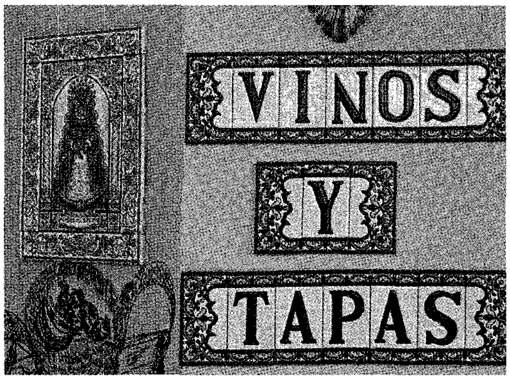

Andalucía: Gastronomic Paradise

The cuisine of Andalucía is as rich with the spirit of improvisation as flamenco, the region's native dance. Tapas were first created here as ad hoc lids for glasses of Andalucía's famous sherry. Gazpacho is the signature dish, which began as a basic blend of bread, olive oil, garlic, vinegar, and spices. When Columbus brought back tomatoes and peppers from the New World, the recipe evolved into the familiar cold tomato soup so popular today, often presented as a gourmet dish served with savory garnishes. Also developed in the area is *ajo blanco,* a cold soup thickened with almonds that dates from the time of the Moors.

Dani García, a chef who is a rising star in Andalucía, continues the imaginative approach to food preparation at Calima, his beachside restaurant in Marbella. A disciple of Ferrán Adrià, who drew the food world to eastern Spain with his avant-garde interpretations of haute cuisine, García focuses on the agricultural wealth of his own native south. From his kitchen, the sea bass comes to the table grilled over hot coals and black sand, which evoke the sensations of a seaside barbecue.

Andalucía's Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts are a constant reminder of sea-inspired feasts. Prawns, langoustines, clams, sardines, hake, bream, grouper, and tuna—all these and much more sizzle on grills and in sauté pans, ready to be anointed with the region's fruity olive oil. Andalucía is the world's largest producer of the golden elixir, with groves concentrated in Jaén and Córdoba provinces, and local cooks seem to have developed a special talent for frying. The exquisitely light crispness of fried anchovies, squid, and small fish is considered the perfect match for chilled, bone-dry Manzanilla sherry.

In the tapas bars of Seville and Granada, ham is the culinary star. The most coveted hams are the world-renowned *jamón de Jabugo*, the air-cured product of Iberian pigs who gorge on acorns and roots in the mountains of Huelva province. Connoisseurs of Spanish ham consider acorn-fed pigs to yield the best meat, which is why this exceptional ham is a favorite indulgence among locals and visitors.

WINE ROUTES

A tasting tour of Cádiz's Sherry Triangle towns and cities is a revelation of subtlety and nuance. Be sure to visit the wineries of Jerez de la Frontera, Sanlúcar de Barrameda, and El Puerto de Santa Maria.

TOP LEFT TO RIGHT: ANDALUSIAN OLIVE OIL ©GARY YEOWELL/GETTY IMAGES; SIGN OUTSIDE BAR, COSTA DEL SOL ©KEN WELSH/ALAMY

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Wolfe gave her a strange look, then threw the pinecone far away and spoke in a cold, opaque voice.

"There is something I must tell you, Natasha. You see, I have never been to Africa or to India. It's all a lie. I am now nearly thirty, but, apart from two or three Russian towns and a dozen villages, and this forlorn country, I have not seen anything. Please forgive me."

He smiled a melancholy smile. He suddenly felt intolerable pity for the grandiose fantasies that had sustained him since childhood.

The weather was autumnally dry and warm. The pines barely creaked as their gold-hued tops swayed.

"An ant," Natasha said, getting up and patting her skirt and stockings. "We've been sitting on ants."

"Do you despise me very much?" Wolfe asked.

She laughed. "Don't be silly. After all, we are even. Everything I told you about my ecstasies and the Virgin Mary and the little bell was fantasy. I thought it all up one day, and after that, naturally, I had the impression that it had really happened. . . ."

"That's just it," Wolfe said, beaming.

"Tell me some more about your travels," Natasha asked, intending no sarcasm.

With a habitual gesture, Wolfe took out his solid cigar case.

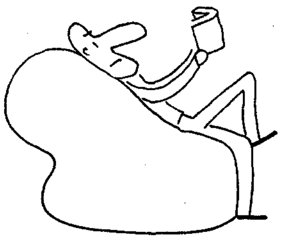
"At your service. Once, when I was sailing on a schooner from Borneo to Sumatra . . ."

V

A gentle slope descended toward the lake. The posts of the wooden jetty were reflected like gray spirals in the water. Beyond the lake was the same dark pine forest, but here and there one could glimpse a white trunk and the mist of yellow leaves of a birch. On the dark-turquoise water floated glints of clouds, and Natasha suddenly recalled Levitan's landscapes. She had the impression that they were in Russia, that you could only be in Russia when such torrid happiness constricts your throat, and she was happy that Wolfe was recounting such marvellous nonsense and, with his little noises, launching small flat stones, which magically skidded and skipped along the water. On this weekday there were no people to be seen; only occasional cloudlets of exclamation or laughter were audible, and on the lake there hovered a white wing—a yacht's sail. They walked for a long time along the shore, ran up the slippery slope, and found a path where the raspberry bushes emitted a whiff of black damp. A little farther, right by the water, there was a café, quite deserted, with nary a waitress or a customer to be seen, as if there were a fire somewhere and they had all run off to look, taking with them their mugs and their plates. Wolfe and Natasha walked around the café, then sat down at an empty table and pretended that they were eating and drinking and an orchestra was playing. And, while they were joking, Natasha suddenly thought she heard the distinct sound of real orange-hued wind music. Then, with a mysterious smile, she gave a start and ran off along the shore. Baron Wolfe ponderously loped after her. "Wait, Natasha—we haven't paid yet!"

Afterward, they found an apple-green meadow, bordered by sedge, through which the sun made the water gleam like liquid gold, and Natasha, squinting and inflating her nostrils, repeated several times, "My God, how wonderful . . ."

Wolfe felt hurt by the unresponsive echo and fell silent, and, at that airy, sunlit instant beside the wide lake, a certain sadness flew past like a melodious beetle.



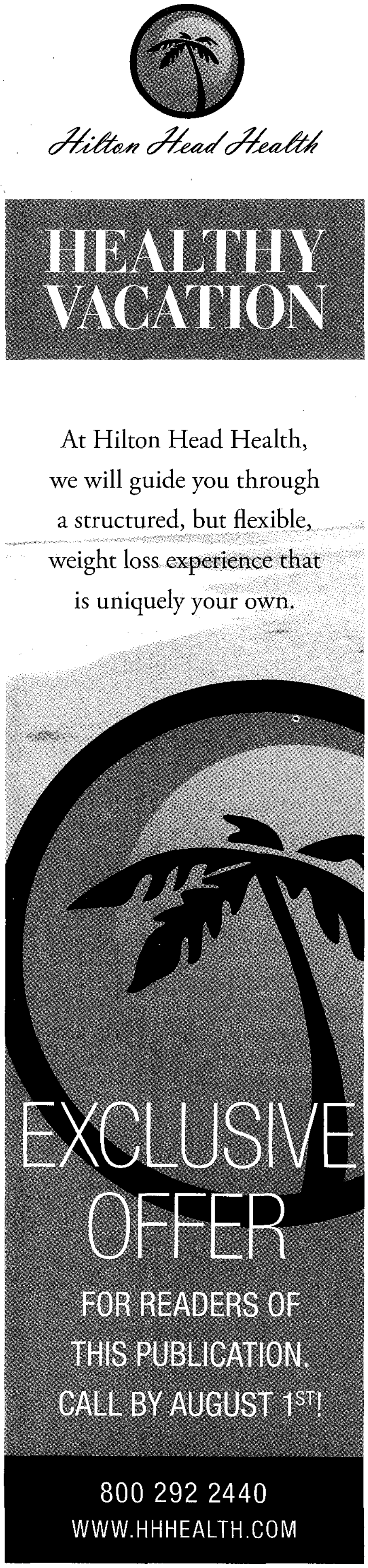
Natasha frowned and said, "For some reason, I have a feeling that Father is worse again. Maybe I should not have left him alone."

Wolfe remembered seeing the old man's thin legs, glossy with gray bristles, as he hopped back into bed. He thought, And what if he really does die today?

"Don't say that, Natasha—he's fine now."

"I think so, too," she said, and grew merry again.

Wolfe took off his jacket, and his thickset body in its striped shirt exhaled a gentle aura of heat. He was walking very close to Natasha; she was looking straight ahead, and she liked the feel of this warmth pacing alongside her.



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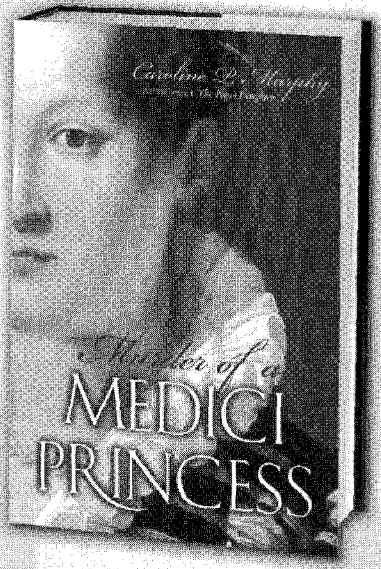

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“How I dream, Natasha, how I dream,” he was saying, waving a small, whistling stick. “Am I really lying when I pass off my fantasies as truth? I had a friend who served for three years in Bombay. Bombay? My God! The music of geographical names. That word alone contains something gigantic, bombs of sunlight, drums. Just imagine, Natasha—that friend of mine was incapable of communicating anything, remembered nothing except work-related squabbles, the heat, the fevers, and the wife of some British colonel. Which of us really visited India? . . . It’s obvious—of course, I am the one. Bombay, Singapore . . . I can recall, for instance . . .”

Natasha was walking along the very edge of the water, so that the child-size waves of the lake plashed up to her feet. Somewhere beyond the woods a train passed, as if it were travelling along a musical string, and both of them stopped to listen. The day had become a bit more golden, a bit softer, and the woods on the far side of the lake now had a bluish cast.

Near the train station, Wolfe bought a paper bag of plums, but they turned out to be sour. Seated in the empty wooden compartment of the train, he threw them at intervals out the window, and kept regretting that, in the café, he had not filched some of those cardboard disks you put under beer mugs.

“They soar so beautifully, Natasha, like birds. It’s a joy to watch.”

Natasha was tired; she would shut her eyes tightly, and then again, as she had been in the night, she would be overcome and carried aloft by a feeling of dizzying lightness.

“When I tell Father about our outing, please don’t interrupt me or correct me. I may well tell him about things we did not see at all. Various little marvels. He’ll understand.”

When they arrived in town, they decided to walk home. Baron Wolfe grew taciturn and grimaced at the ferocious noise of the automobile horns, while Natasha seemed propelled by sails, as if her fatigue sustained her, endowed her with wings and made her weightless, and Wolfe seemed all blue, as blue as the evening. One block short of their house, Wolfe suddenly stopped. Natasha flew past. Then she, too, stopped. She looked around. Raising his shoulders, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his ample trousers, Wolfe lowered his light-blue head like a bull. Glancing sideways, he said that he loved her. Then, turning rapidly, he walked away and entered a tobacco shop.

Natasha stood for a while, as if suspended in midair, then slowly walked toward the house. This, too, I shall tell Father, she thought, advancing through a blue mist of happiness, amid which the street lamps were coming alight like precious stones. She felt that she was growing weak, that hot, silent billows were coursing along her spine. When she reached the house, she saw her father, in a black jacket, shielding his unbuttoned shirt collar with one hand and swinging his door keys with the other, come out hurriedly, slightly hunched in the evening fog, and head for the newsstand.

“Daddy,” she called, and walked after him. He stopped at the edge of the sidewalk and, tilting his head, glanced at her with his familiar wily smile.

“My little rooster, all gray-haired. You shouldn’t be going out,” Natasha said.

Her father tilted his head the other way, and said very softly, “Dearest, there’s something fabulous in the paper today. Only I forgot to bring money. Could you run upstairs and get it? I’ll wait here.”

She gave the door a push, cross with her father, and at the same time glad that he was so chipper. She ascended the stairs quickly, aerially, as in a dream. She hurried along the hall. *He might catch cold standing there waiting for me. . . .*

For some reason, the hall light was on. Natasha approached her door and simultaneously heard the susurration of soft speech behind it. She opened the door quickly. A kerosene lamp stood on the table, smoking densely. The landlady, a chambermaid, and some unfamiliar person were blocking the way to the bed. They all turned when Natasha entered, and the landlady, with an exclamation, rushed toward her. . . .

Only then did Natasha notice her father lying on the bed, looking not at all as she had just seen him, but a dead little old man with a waxen nose. ♦

(*Circa 1924. Translated, from the Russian, by Dmitri Nabokov.*)

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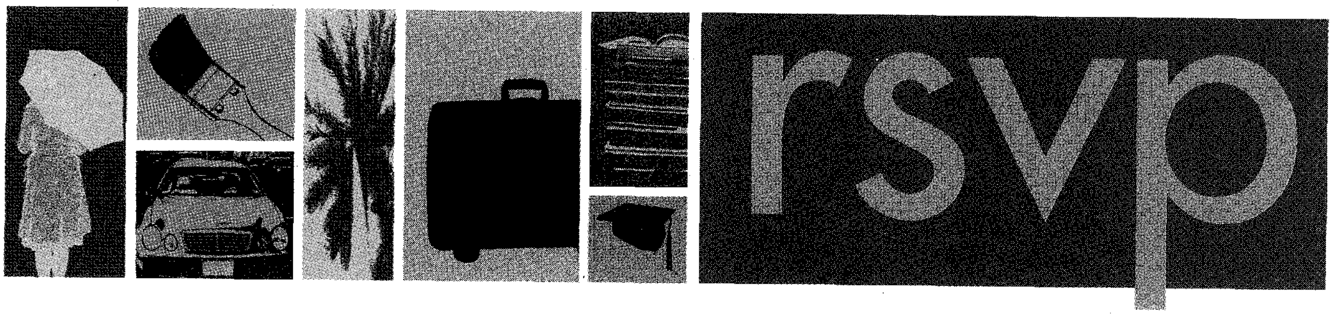

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FAITH AND DOUBT

COMMUNION

It was one of those rainy, miserable days in Nairobi. Since I had skipped morning Mass at Hekima College, the Jesuit school of theology where I was studying, I had to get out my umbrella and walk to Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, near Adams Arcade, on the edge of the Kibera slums. I had more on my mind than the drizzle and the sporadic lightning. I felt the weight of all the papers I still had to write—on the sacraments, on social justice, on canon law. I thought about the dreaded four-teacher panel I would face at the end of my studies. Would I be ordained? Should I present myself for ordination? The child-molestation scandal had just broken in Boston, and I had been too ashamed to reply to e-mails from family and friends asking about it. The small community of Jesuits I lived in had seemingly endless, niggling problems, and the thought of sitting down together later that evening to talk about who was not cleaning up after snacks or who was monopolizing our communal cars only added to my stress.

As I walked toward Ngong Road, the drizzle gave way to driving rain. Clad in winter clothes, I was warm enough for the ten-minute walk to church. Now I pulled my huge multicolored umbrella closer to my head to shield myself from the wind.

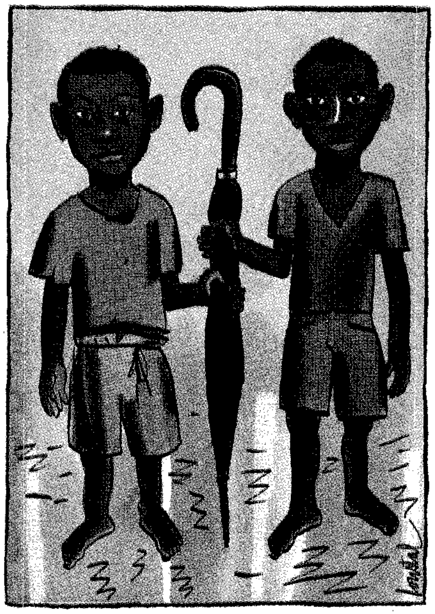
On the premises of Guadalupe, under the eaves of the wooden kiosk where sacramentals were sold on Sundays, were two children.

"*Broder*, money!" one said to me.

"No money," I said.

"Shilling, *kwa* bread," the other insisted, touching his stomach.

I ignored them. I knew they were part of the gang of street kids that hung around Adams Arcade. I was sure they had recognized me, as they did most of the seminarians. They were no more than seven or eight years old. Their hair was wild, and beads of water sat on them like morning dew. They were barefoot, in shorts, and their wet T-shirts stuck to their bloated stomachs. They squatted side by side, each rubbing his palms together as if praying to some god of warmth. Their eyes, hard and calculating, took in the few people arriving for Mass: civil servants, slum-dwellers, traders, reverend sisters.



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

Before I knew it, the street kids were under the umbrella with me, feeling the pockets of my trousers, giggling. Even though there was no money in my wallet, I had transferred it to the breast pocket of my jacket. I'd heard too many stories of these guys picking pockets. I tried to dismiss them politely, but they'd already noticed my wallet. Being Nigerian, I didn't know enough Kiswahili to explain that it was empty. I wanted to shout at them, to force them away, but through the open door I could hear that Mass had already started.

I invited the boys inside, hoping that they would shake their heads and withdraw to the kiosk. Instead, they followed me into the cavernous church. I had gambled and lost.

I handed my furled umbrella to one of the boys so that I could hold their hands to control them. We walked up the central aisle to join the sparse congregation that ringed the sanctuary, the big Guadalupe mural looming beyond the altar. Suddenly, they scrambled out of my grasp. When I looked back during the first reading, I spotted the crooks sitting on a pew, playing with the umbrella. I was beginning to get angry. If they ran off with my umbrella, how would I get home? Throughout the readings and homily and the Offertory and Consecration, the kids chatted away. I could see their mouths, wide open, moving in never-ending prattle.

As I walked back to my seat after receiving Communion, I was unsettled to see that they had slipped into the line going up the aisle. They were very quiet now, their gaze fixed on the golden ciborium as the priest took out the wafer to place on the tongues of the faithful. Occasionally, the boys glanced at the other children in the line and copied their gestures, joining their palms together, bowing their heads. Then they would watch intently the mouth of someone who had just received. Fear gripped my heart—fear that some churchwarden would be incensed by their sacrilege and, as in the church of my youth, drag them outside by the ear; fear that the priest would deny them at the last moment; fear that I might never risk as much for the Body of Christ. I held my breath, already feeling guilty that I had set them up for a possible fall.

As soon as the two boys had received Communion and turned away from the priest, they chewed hastily, with exaggerated movements, their mouths like the mandibles of a spider devouring an insect. Then they lost their composure and hurried out excitedly. After Mass, they returned my umbrella.

—*Uwem Akpan*

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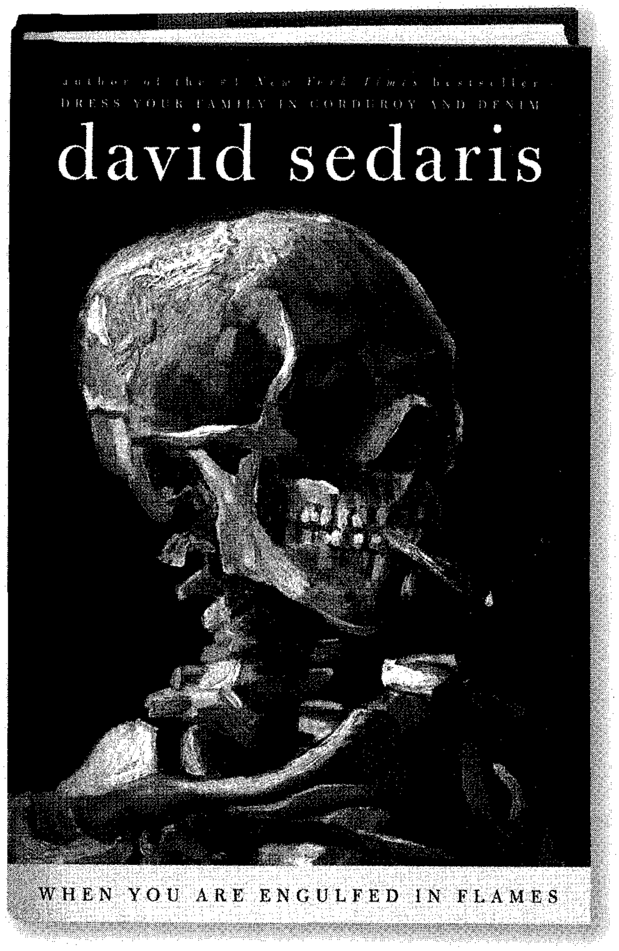
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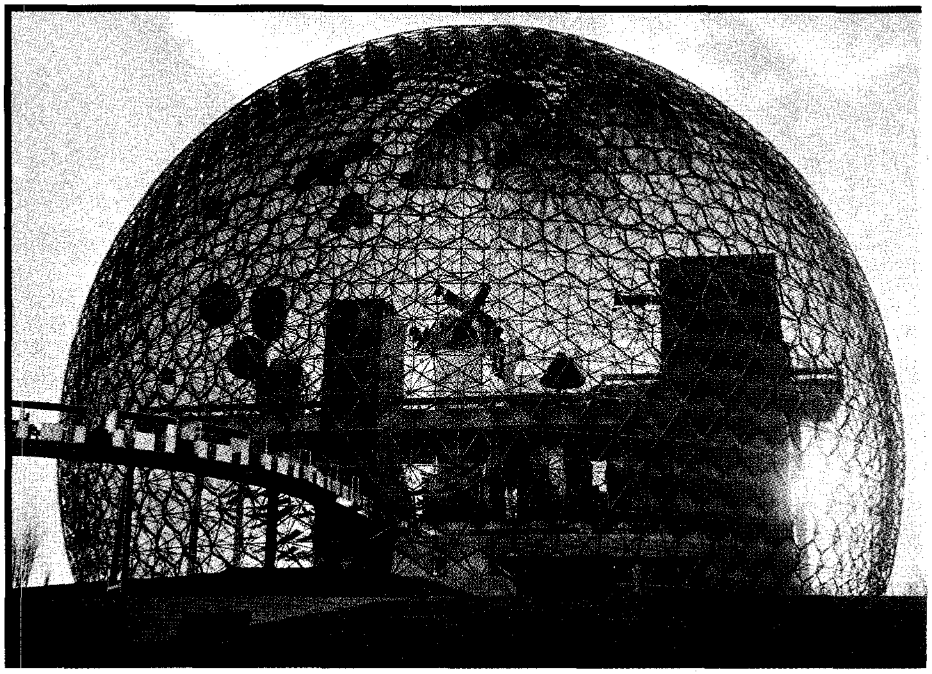
The visions of Buckminster Fuller.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

One of Buckminster Fuller's earliest inventions was a car shaped like a blimp. The car had three wheels—two up front, one in the back—and a periscope instead of a rear window. Owing to its unusual design, it could be maneuvered into a parking space nose first and could execute a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn so tightly that it would end up practically where it had started, facing the opposite direction. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, where the car was introduced in the summer of 1933, it caused such a sensation that gridlock followed, and anxious drivers implored Fuller to keep it off the streets at rush hour.

Fuller called his invention the Dymaxion Vehicle. He believed that it would not just revolutionize automaking but help bring about a wholesale reordering of modern life. Soon, Fuller thought, people would be living in standardized, prefabricated dwellings, and this, in turn, would allow them to occupy regions previously considered uninhabitable—the Arctic, the Sahara, the tops of mountains. The Dymaxion Vehicle would carry them to their new homes; it would be capable of travelling on the roughest roads and—once the technology for the requisite engines had been worked out—it would also (somehow) be able to fly. Fuller envisioned the Dymaxion taking off almost vertically, like a duck.

Fuller's schemes often had the hallucinatory quality associated with science fiction (or mental hospitals). It concerned him not in the least that things had always been done a certain way in the past. In addition to flying cars, he imagined mass-produced bathrooms that could be installed like refrigerators; underwater settlements that would be restocked by submarine; and floating communities that, along with all their inhabitants, would hover among the clouds. Most famously, he dreamed up the geodesic dome. "If you are in a shipwreck and all the boats are gone, a piano top . . . that comes along makes a fortuitous life preserver," Fuller once wrote. "But this is not to say that the best way to design a life preserver is in the form of a piano top. I think that we are clinging to a great many piano tops in accepting yesterday's fortuitous contrivings." Fuller may have spent his life inventing things, but he claimed that he was not particularly interested in inventions. He called himself a "comprehensive, anticipatory design scientist"—a "comprehensivist," for short—and believed that his task was to innovate in such a way as to benefit the greatest number of people using the least amount of resources. "My objective was humanity's comprehensive success in the universe" is how he once put it. "I could have ended up with a pair of flying slippers."


The U.S. Pavilion for the 1967 World's Fair, in Montreal (above). The inventions th

COURTESY ESTATE OF R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

Fuller's career is the subject of a new exhibition, "Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe," which opens later this month at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The exhibition traces the long, loopy arc of his career from early doodlings to plans he drew up shortly before his death, twenty-five years ago this summer. It will feature studies for several of his geodesic domes and the only surviving Dymaxion Vehicle. By staging the retrospective, the Whitney raises—or, really, one should say, re-raises—the question of Fuller's relevance. Was he an important cultural figure because he produced inventions of practical value or because he didn't?

Richard Buckminster Fuller, Jr.—Bucky, to his friends—was born on July 12, 1895, into one of New England's most venerable and, at the same time, most freethinking families. His great-great-grandfather, the Reverend Timothy Fuller, a Massachusetts delegate to the Federal Constitutional Assembly, was so outraged by the Constitution's sanctioning of slavery that he came out against ratification. His great-aunt Margaret Fuller, a friend of Emerson and Thoreau, edited the transcendentalist journal *The Dial* and later became America's first female foreign correspondent.

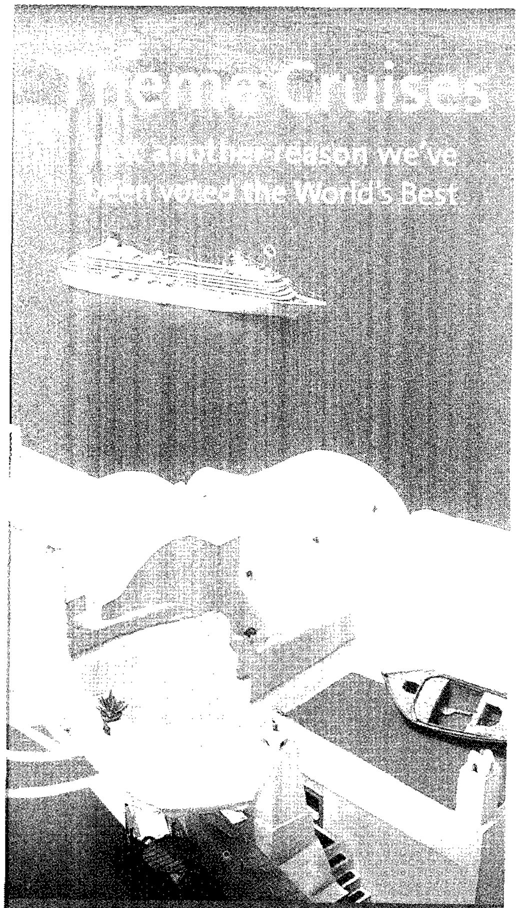
Growing up in Milton, Massachusetts, Bucky was a boisterous but hopelessly nearsighted child; until he was fitted with glasses, he refused to believe that the world was not blurry. Like all Fuller men, he was sent off to Harvard. Halfway through his freshman year, he withdrew his tuition money from the bank to entertain some chorus girls in Manhattan. He was expelled. The following fall, he was reinstated, only to be thrown out again. Fuller never did graduate from Harvard, or any other school. He took a job with a meatpacking firm, then joined the Navy, where he invented a winchlike device for rescuing pilots of the service's primitive airplanes. (The pilots often ended up head down, under water.)

During the First World War, Fuller married Anne Hewlett, the daughter of a prominent architect, and when the war was over he started a business with his father-in-law, manufacturing bricks out of wood shavings. Despite the general prosperity of the period, the company struggled and, in 1927, nearly bankrupt, it was bought out. At just about the same time, Anne gave birth to a daughter. With no job and a new baby to support, Fuller became depressed. One day, he was walking by Lake Michigan, thinking about, in his words, "Buckminster Fuller—life or death," when he found himself suspended several feet above the ground, surrounded by sparkling light. Time seemed to stand still, and a voice spoke to him. "You do not have the right to eliminate yourself," it said. "You do not belong to you. You belong to Universe." (In Fuller's idiosyncratic English, "universe"—capitalized—is never preceded by the definite article.) It was at this point, according to Fuller, that he decided to embark on his "lifelong experiment." The experiment's aim was nothing less than determining "what, if anything," an individual could do "on behalf of all humanity." For this study, Fuller would serve both as the researcher and as the object of inquiry. (He referred to himself as Guinea Pig B, the "B" apparently being for Bucky.) Fuller moved his wife and daughter into a tiny studio in a Chicago slum and, instead of finding a job, took to spending his days in the library, reading Gandhi and Leonardo. He began to record his own ideas, which soon filled two thousand pages. In 1928, he edited the manuscript down to fifty pages, and had it published in a booklet called "4D Time Lock," which he sent out to, among others, Vincent Astor, Bertrand Russell, and Henry Ford.

uller (above, in 1959, flying in a helicopter over Ohio) designed had a hallucinatory appeal.

ELLIOT ERWITT/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Like most of Fuller's writings, "4D Time Lock" is nearly impossible to read; its sentences, Slinky-like, stretch on and on and on. (One of his biographers observed of "4D Time Lock" that "worse prose is barely conceivable.") At its heart is a critique of the construction industry. Imagine, Fuller says, what would happen if a person, seeking to purchase an automobile, had to hire a designer, then send the plans out for bid, then show them to the bank, and then have them approved by the town council, all before work on the vehicle could begin. "Few would have the temerity to go through with it," he notes, and those who did would have to pay something like fifty thousand



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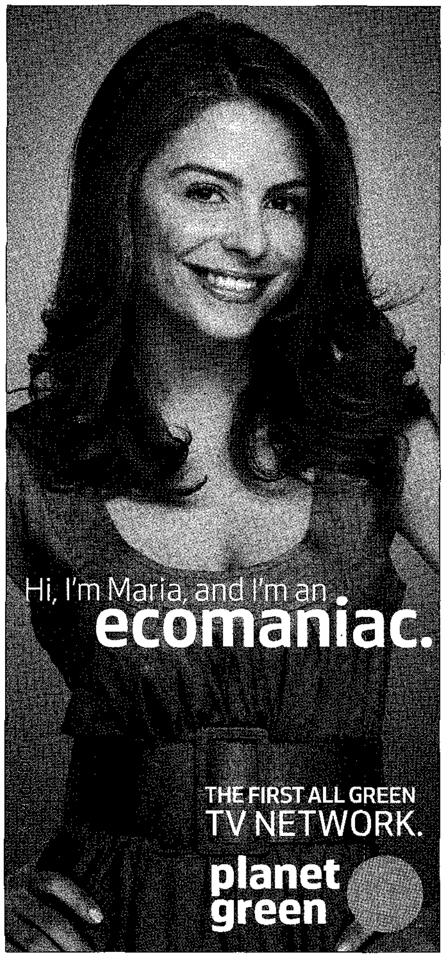
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dollars—half a million in today's money—per car. Such a system, so obviously absurd for autos, persisted for houses, Fuller argued, because of retrograde thinking. (His own failure at peddling wood-composite bricks he cited as evidence of the construction industry's recalcitrance.) What was needed was a "New Era Home," which would be "erectable in one day, complete in every detail," and, on top of that, "drudgery-proof," with "every living appliance known to mankind, built-in."

Not coincidentally, Fuller was working to design just such a home. One plan, which never made it beyond the sketching stage, called for ultra-lightweight towers to be assembled at a central location, then transported to any spot in the world, via zeppelin. (Fuller envisioned the zeppelin crew excavating the site by dropping a small bomb.) A second, only slightly less fabulous proposal was for what Fuller came to call the Dymaxion House. The hexagonal-shaped, single-family home was to be stamped out of metal and suspended from a central mast that would contain all its wiring and plumbing. When a family moved, the Dymaxion House could be disassembled and taken along, like a bed or a table. Fuller constructed a scale model of the house, which was exhibited in 1929 at Marshall Field's as part of a display of modern furniture. But no full-size version could be produced, because many of the components, including what Fuller called a "radio-television receiver," did not yet exist. Fuller estimated that it would take a billion dollars to develop the necessary technologies. Not surprisingly, the money wasn't forthcoming.

Fuller was fond of neologisms. He coined the word "livingry," as the opposite of "weaponry"—which he called "killingry"—and popularized the term "spaceship earth." (He claimed to have invented "debunk," but probably did not.) Another one of his coinages was "ephemeralization," which meant, roughly speaking, "dematerialization." Fuller was a strong believer in the notion that "less is more," and not just in the aestheticized, Miesian sense of the phrase. He imagined that buildings would eventually be "ephemeralized" to such an extent that construction materials would be dispensed with altogether, and builders would instead rely on "electrical field and other utterly invisible environment controls."

Fuller's favorite neologism, "dymaxion," was concocted purely for public relations. When Marshall Field's displayed his model house, it wanted a catchy label, so it hired a consultant, who fashioned "dymaxion" out of bits of "dynamic," "maximum," and "ion." Fuller was so taken with the word, which had no known meaning, that he adopted it as a sort of brand name. The Dymaxion House led to the Dymaxion Vehicle, which led, in turn, to the Dymaxion Bathroom and the Dymaxion Deployment Unit, essentially a grain bin with windows. As a child, Fuller had assembled scrapbooks of letters and newspaper articles on subjects that interested him; when, later, he decided to keep a more systematic record of his life, including everything from his correspondence to his dry-cleaning bills, it became the Dymaxion Chronofile.

All the Dymaxion projects generated a great deal of hype, and that was clearly Fuller's desire. All of them also flopped. The first prototype of the Dymaxion Vehicle had been on the road for just three months when it crashed, near the entrance to the Chicago World's Fair; the driver was killed, and one of the passengers—a British aviation expert—was seriously injured. Eventually, it was revealed that another car was responsible for the accident, but only two more Dymaxion Vehicles were produced before production was halted, in 1934. Only thirteen models of the Dymaxion Bathroom—a single unit that came with a built-in tub, toilet, and sink—were constructed before the manufacturer pulled the plug on that project, in 1936. The Dymaxion Deployment Unit, which Fuller imagined being used as a mobile shelter, failed because after the United States entered the Second World War he could no longer obtain any steel. In 1945, Fuller attempted to mass-produce the Dymaxion House, entering into a joint effort with Beech Aircraft, which was based in Wichita. Two examples of the house were built before that project, too, collapsed. (The only surviving prototype, known as the Wichita House, looks like a cross between an onion dome and a flying saucer; it is now on display at the Henry Ford Museum, in Dearborn, Michigan.)

Following this string of disappointments, Fuller might have decided that his "experiment" had run its course. Instead,

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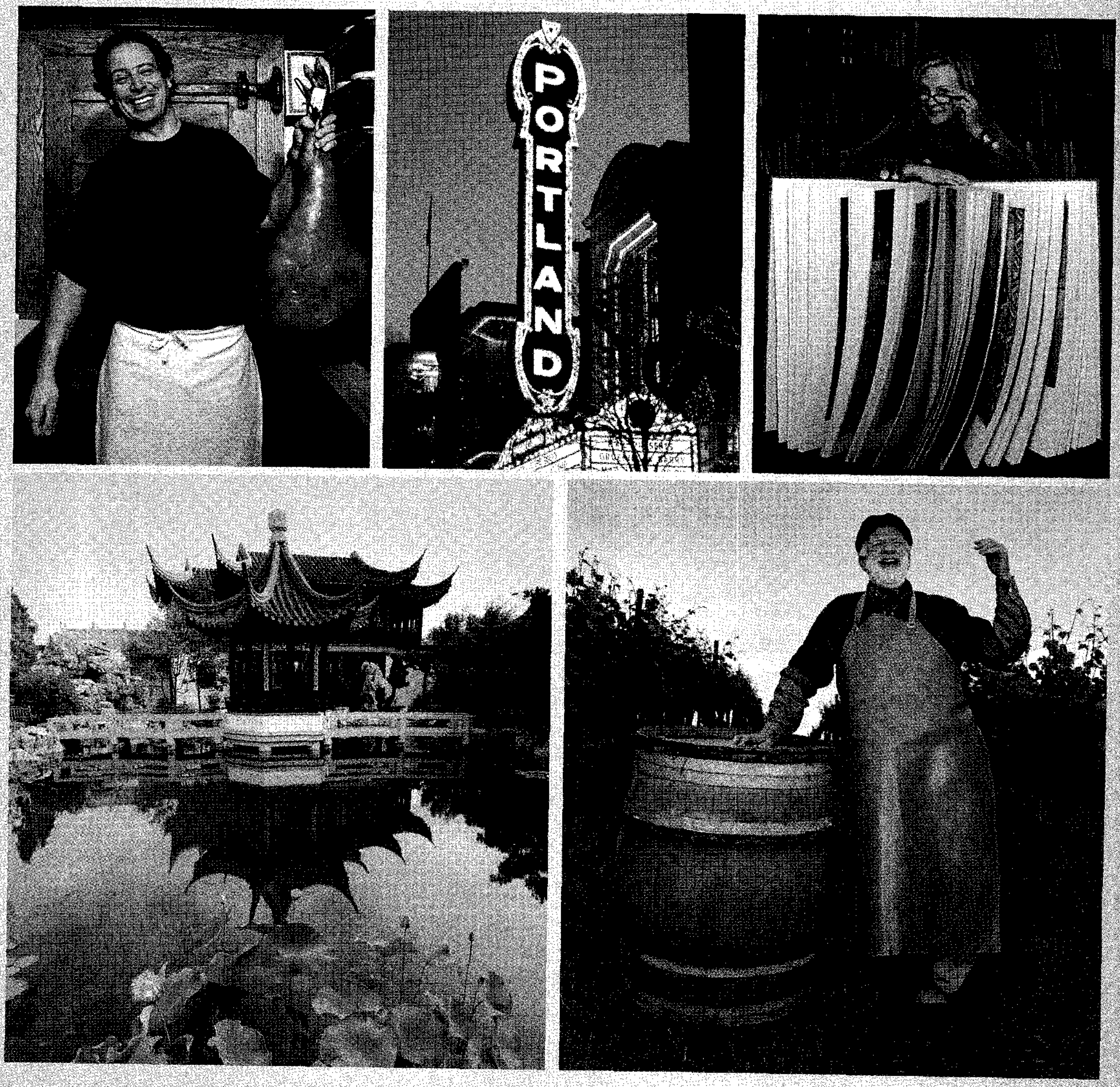

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China Forbes and Thomas Lauderdale of Pink Martini, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland, Oregon

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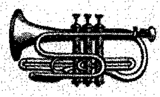

THE OREGON ARTIST

THE TALE OF HOW ONE DAY, WHEN THE TOWERING TREES AND THE SNOWY GLACIERS WERE NOT PAYING ATTENTION, A CERTAIN STATE WOKE UP AND FOUND THAT IT HAD SPROUTED A WHOLE CROP OF EXTRAORDINARILY TALENTED AND, LET'S BE HONEST, UNCONVENTIONAL ARTISTS.

In the lush and fertile land called Oregon, where the vineyards and forests and rivers are known far and wide for their epic abundance, there came a gentle rumbling amongst the people. This rumbling came to be known as an "art scene," meaning that this place also had a mysterious gift for nurturing the smart and interesting and talented people who came to its shores. In other parts of the world, these people might feel out of place or ahead of their time or even a little crazy. And yet, when they would land on Oregon soil, often after a long cross-country trip that involved camping, they would begin to thrive.

And this is more or less what happened to a band called Pink Martini, whose bandleader and vocalist met at Harvard and dreamed that it might be possible to make a new yet timeless music that would make granddads tap their feet and toddlers dance and give girls of all ages chills like you get from romantic old movies where everyone is well-dressed and there's a decanter of whiskey and a piano in every room. And so they came together in Portland. After a while, the seeds of their music floated across the sea to Europe, and soon the whole world was clamoring for it.

It has happened to many a chef and many a painter and many a band, and when you visit, you will notice that this art scene is like no other. It is a scene you may want to paint yourself into, especially if you are smart and interesting and talented yourself, which you obviously are. So pack up your ears and eyes and paintbrush and start planning your Oregon arts getaway by calling 1-800-547-7842 or visiting traveloregon.com.

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he kept right on going. Turning his attention to mathematics, he concluded that the Cartesian coördinate system had got things all wrong and invented his own system, which he called Synergetic Geometry. Synergetic Geometry was based on sixty-degree (rather than ninety-degree) angles, took the tetrahedron to be the basic building block of the universe, and avoided the use of pi, a number that Fuller found deeply distasteful. By 1948, Fuller's geometric investigations had led him to the idea of the geodesic dome—essentially, a series of struts that could support a covering skin. That summer, he was invited to teach at Black Mountain College, in North Carolina, where some of the other instructors included Josef Albers, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham. ("I remember thinking it's Bucky Fuller and his magic show," Cunningham would later recall of Fuller's arrival.) Toward the end of his stay, Fuller and a team of students assembled a trial dome out of Venetian-blind slats. Immediately upon being completed, the dome sagged and fell in on itself. (Some of the observers referred to it as a "flopahedron.") Fuller insisted that this outcome had been intentional—he was, he said, trying to determine the critical point at which the dome would collapse—but no one seems to have believed this. The following year, Anne Fuller sold thirty thousand dollars' worth of I.B.M. stock to finance Bucky's continuing research, and in 1950 he succeeded in erecting a dome fifty feet in diameter.

The geodesic dome is a prime example of "ephemeralization"; it can enclose more space with less material than virtually any other structure. The first commercial use of Fuller's design came in 1953, when the Ford Motor Company decided to cover the central courtyard of its Rotunda building, in Dearborn. The walls of the building, which had been erected for a temporary exhibit, were not strong enough to support a conventional dome. Fuller designed a geodesic dome of aluminum struts fitted with fibreglass panes. The structure spanned ninety-three feet, yet weighed just eight and a half tons. It received a tremendous amount of press, almost all of it positive, with the result that geodesic domes soon became popular for all sorts of purposes. They seemed to spring up "like toadstools after a rain," as one commentator put it.

The geodesic dome transformed Fuller from an eccentric outsider into an eccentric insider. He was hired by the Pentagon to design protective housing for radar equipment along the Distant Early Warning, or DEW, line; the structure became known as a radome. He also developed a system for erecting temporary domes at trade fairs all around the world. (Nikita Khrushchev supposedly became so enamored of one such dome, built for a fair in Moscow, that he insisted that

"It didn't have to end like this."

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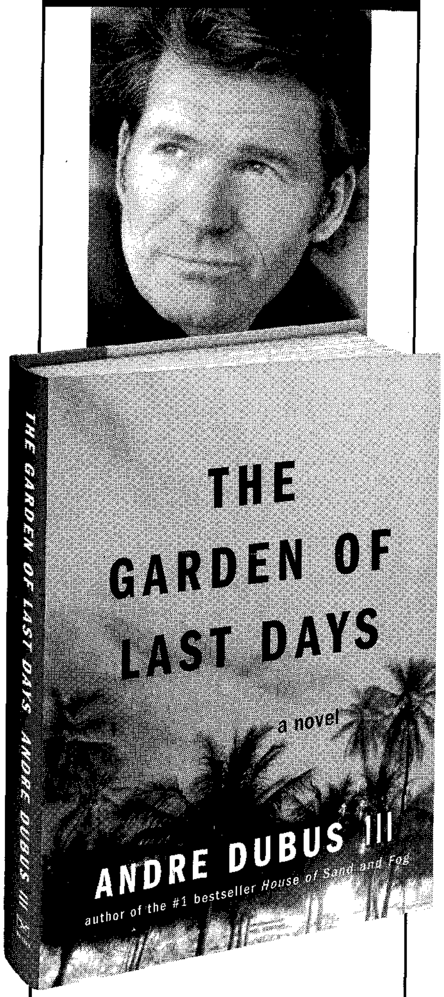
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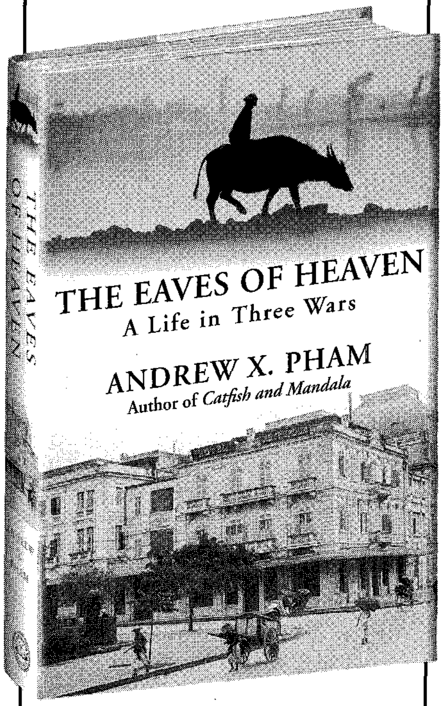

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—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

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"Buckingham Fuller" come to Russia "and teach our engineers.") Fuller was offered an appointment at Southern Illinois University, in Carbondale, and he had a dome-home built near campus for himself and Anne. In 1965, he was commissioned by the United States Information Agency to design the U.S. Pavilion for the Montreal Expo. Though the exhibit inside was criticized as uninspiring, Fuller's dome, which looked as if it were about to float free of the earth, was a hit.

As the fame of the dome—and domes themselves—spread, Fuller was in near-constant demand as a speaker. "I travel between Southern and Northern hemispheres and around the world so frequently that I no longer have any so-called normal winter and summer, nor normal night and day," he wrote in "Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth." "I wear three watches to tell me what time it is." Castro-like, Fuller could lecture for ten hours at a stretch. (A friend of mine who took an architecture course from Fuller at Yale recalls that classes lasted from nine o'clock in the morning until five in the evening, and that Fuller talked basically the entire time.) Audiences were enraptured and also, it seems, mystified. "It was great! What did he say?" became the standard joke. The first "Whole Earth Catalog," which was dedicated to Fuller, noted that his language "makes demands on your head like suddenly discovering an extra engine in your car."

In "Bucky," a biography-cum-meditation, published in 1973, the critic Hugh Kenner observed, "One of the ways I could arrange this book would make Fuller's talk seem systematic. I could also make it look like a string of platitudes, or like a set of notions never entertained before, or like a delirium." On the one hand, Fuller insisted that all the world's problems—from hunger and illiteracy to war—could be solved by technology. "You may . . . want to ask me how we are going to resolve the ever-accelerating dangerous impasse of world-opposed politicians and ideological dogmas," he observed at one point. "I answer, it will be resolved by the computer." On the other hand, he rejected fundamental tenets of modern science, most notably evolution. "We arrived from elsewhere in Universe as complete human beings," he maintained. He further insisted that humans had spread not from Africa but from Polynesia, and that dolphins were descended from these early, seafaring earthlings.

Although he looked to nature as the exemplar of efficient design, he was not terribly interested in the natural world, and mocked those who warned about problems like resource depletion and overpopulation. "When world realization of its unlimited wealth has been established there as yet will be room for the whole of humanity to stand indoors in greater New York City, with more room for each human than at an average cocktail party," he wrote. He envisioned cutting people off from the elements entirely by building domed cities, which, he claimed, would offer free climate control, winter and summer. "A two-mile-diameter dome has been calculated to cover Mid-Manhattan Island, spanning west to east at 42nd Street," he observed. "The cost saving in ten years would pay for the dome. Domed cities are going to be essential to the occupation of the Arctic and the Antarctic." As an alternative, he developed a plan for a tetrahedral city, which was intended to house a million people and float in Tokyo Bay.

He also envisioned what he called Cloud Nines, communities that would dwell in extremely lightweight spheres, covered in a polyethylene skin. As the sun warmed the air inside, Fuller claimed, the sphere and all the buildings within it would rise into the air, like a balloon. "Many thousands of passengers could be housed aboard one-mile-diameter and larger cloud structures," he wrote. In the late seventies, Fuller took up with Werner Erhard, the controversial founder of the equally controversial est movement, and the pair set off on a speaking tour across America. Fuller championed, and for many years adhered to, a dietary regimen that consisted exclusively of prunes, tea, steak, and Jell-O.

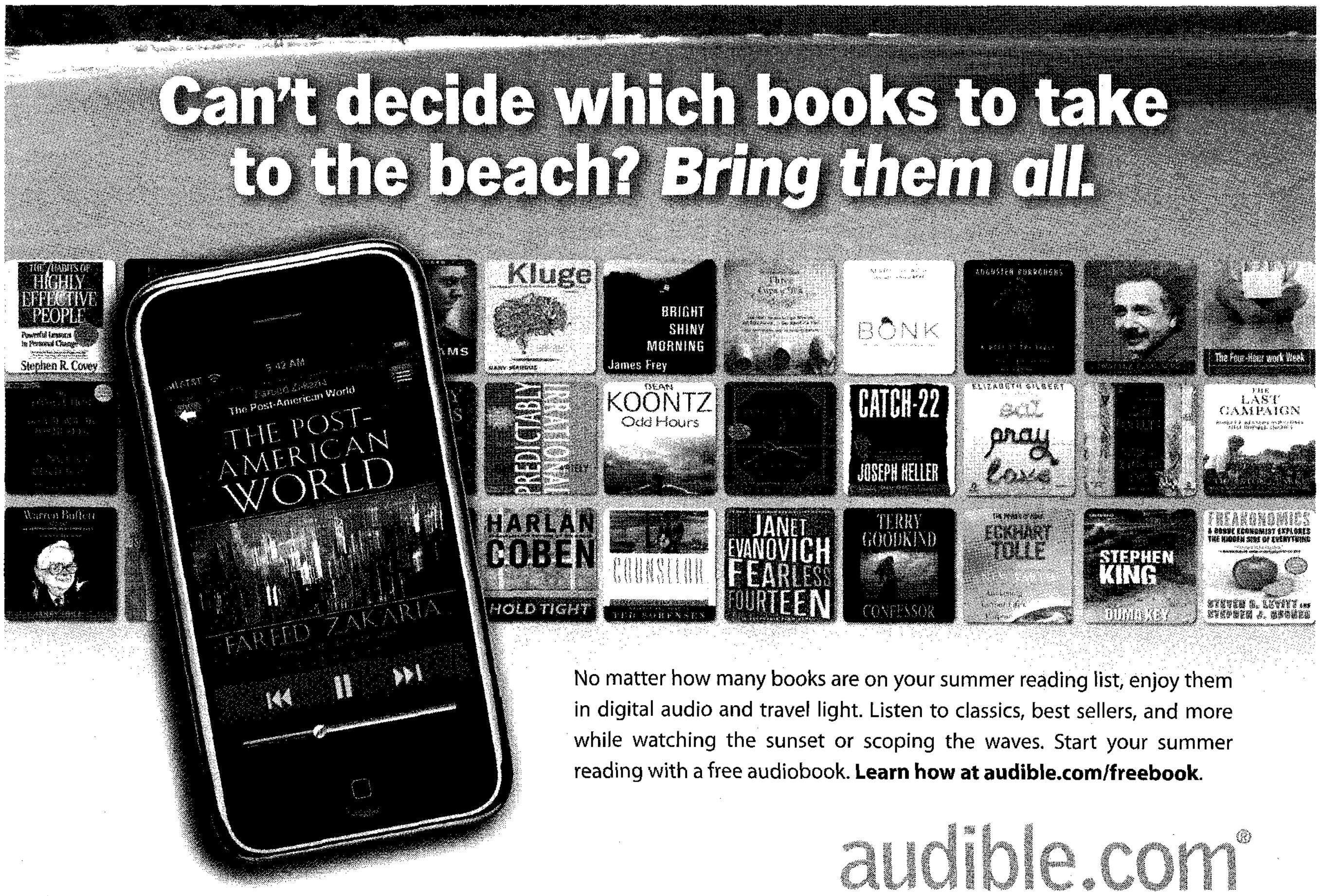
The Dymaxion Vehicle, the Dymaxion House, "comprehensive, anticipatory design," Synergetic Geometry, floating cities, Jell-O—what does it all add up to? In conjunction with the Whitney retrospective, the exhibition's two curators, K. Michael Hays and Dana Miller, have put together a book of essays, articles, and photographs—"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe." Several of the authors in the volume gamely, if inconclusively, grapple with Fuller's legacy. Antoine Picon, a professor of architecture at Harvard, notes that the detail with which Fuller's life was recorded—the Dymaxion Chronofile eventually grew to more than two hundred thousand pages—has had the paradoxical effect of obscuring its significance. Elizabeth A. T. Smith, the chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, writes that Fuller's influence on "creative practice" has been "more wide-ranging than previously thought," but goes on to acknowledge that this influence is "difficult to pinpoint or define with certainty." In their introduction, Hays and Miller maintain that Fuller helped "us see the perils and possibilities" of the twentieth century. They stress his "continuing relevance as an aid to history," though exactly what they mean by this seems purposefully unclear.

The fact that so few of Fuller's ideas were ever realized certainly makes it hard to argue for his importance as an inventor. Even his most successful creation, the geodesic dome, proved to be a dud. In 1994, Stewart Brand, the founding editor of the "Whole Earth Catalog" and an early, self-described dome "propagandist," called geodesics a "massive, total failure":

> Domes leaked, always. The angles between the facets could never be sealed successfully. If you gave up and tried to shingle the whole damn thing—dangerous process, ugly result—the nearly horizontal shingles on top still took in water. The inside was basically one big room, impossible to subdivide, with too much space wasted up high. The shape made it a whispering gallery that broadcast private sounds to everyone.

Among the domes that leaked were Fuller's own home, in Carbondale, and the structure atop the Ford Rotunda. (When workmen were sent to try to reseal the Rotunda's dome, they ended up burning down the entire building.)

Fuller's impact as a social theorist is equally ambiguous. He insisted that the future could be radically different from the past, that humanity was capable of finding solutions to the most intractable-seeming problems, and that the only thing standing in the way was the tendency to cling to old "piano tops." But Fuller was also deeply pessimistic about people's capacity for change, which was why, he said, he had become an inventor in the first place. "I made up my mind . . . that I would never try to reform man—that's much too difficult," he told an interviewer for this magazine in 1966. "What I would do was to try to modify the environment in such a way as to get man moving in preferred directions." Fuller's writings and speeches are filled with this sort of tension, or, if you prefer, contradiction. He was a material determinist who believed in radical autonomy, an individualist who extolled mass production, and an environmentalist who wanted to dome over the Arctic. In the end, Fuller's greatest accomplishment may consist not in any particular idea or artifact but in the whole unlikely experiment that was Guinea Pig B. Instead of destroying himself, Fuller listened to Universe. He spent the next fifty years in a headlong, ceaseless act of self-assertion, one that took so many forms that, twenty-five years after his death, we are still trying to sort it all out. ♦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FAITH AND DOUBT

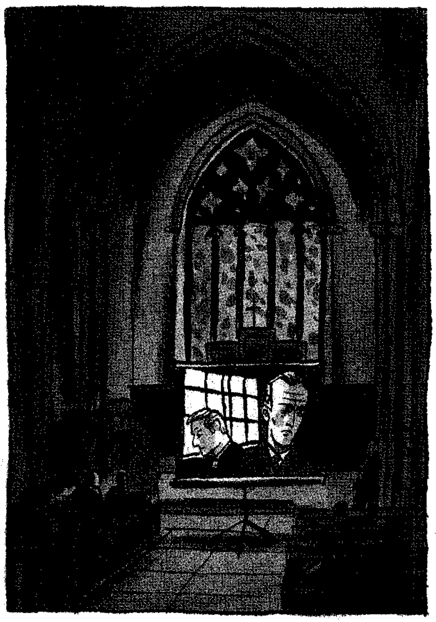
WINTER LIGHT

One night in Oxford, in the winter of 1970, a friend dropped by my room to see if I wanted to take in a movie. Rob was English, some years younger than I, nearing his last term. I was twenty-five, but only a second-year undergraduate, playing catch-up after four years in the Army and another at loose ends. We weren't close friends, but we sometimes hit a flick together or went to the pub to drink and try to meet girls—not so easy in those days, when Oxford was overwhelmingly male, and those males all pretty desperate. Rob, witty and easygoing, had the advantage of seeming not to be desperate. But mostly we struck out, and spent our time drinking and joking around. When we talked about ideas, we treated them dispassionately, donnishly, as if they were moves in a game of chess.

So what was on offer that night? Nothing of interest but a Bergman film, "Winter Light," showing at a local church. I wasn't a churchgoer, nor was Rob, but neither of us had seen the movie, and, after all, it was Bergman, and free, so we went.

The church was cold. There couldn't have been more than twenty-five, thirty of us scattered around the pews in our overcoats and scarves. The minister, a rugged-looking man with a Northern accent, stood before the screen and welcomed us, said he looked forward to the discussion that would follow the film. He was direct and plain in his speech, without a trace of the fluty, elevated manner my English friends so loved to parody in their High Church chaplains. Before taking his seat, he bowed his head and asked us to join him in prayer. Rob and I exchanged arch glances: so this wasn't quite free.

After the first scoffing murmurs of recognition—the opening scenes of the film show a cold-looking church with a few parishioners in overcoats—we all settled down. You simply cannot be ironical in the face of this movie, its adamant seriousness, the unguarded, naked urgency of its story, and the challenge it presents both to believers and to skeptics to assess the depth and consequences of their convictions.



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

Tomas, a Lutheran pastor and widower, is suffering a crisis of faith, barely going through the motions of his ministry; indeed, he can't even find the heart to treat his lover, a schoolteacher, with kindness. One of his parishioners has become obsessed with the prospect of nuclear annihilation. At his wife's urging, this man, a fisherman, comes to the pastor for reassurance, some blessed word of hope that he can grasp as a lifeline, but Tomas can offer nothing but the bleakness of his own despair. The fisherman commits suicide. Yet Bergman takes care to show that Tomas and the fisherman are not alone in their suffering, and that others, equally afflicted—the fisherman's wife, the pastor's steadfast lover, his hunchbacked assistant—are able to bear their pain into a still deeper faith and capacity for love.

It is a harrowing experience, this film, shot starkly in the winter light of its title and filled with wintry silences, the camera often unmoving in its scrutiny of the human face in anguish, uncertainty, and yearning. When the movie ended, we all sat there as if stunned. I used the word "harrowing." Truly I felt harrowed, crust broken, buried things churning to the surface. The minister returned to the front of the church. In his frank, conversational way, he described his understanding of the movie—humanity in peril, lonely, afraid, as we seek power and find only more fear and loneliness, hiding from one another and from what we really want and what would give us true strength and friendship and new life, and yet here it is, all the while, knocking on our door—

Now the minister motioned to the projectionist, and an image of Jesus holding a lantern filled the screen. I had seen it before, in the Keble College chapel: William Holman Hunt's painting "The Light of the World."

Let me say that up to that moment I'd been listening, really listening, attentive as the fisherman for an answer to the bleakness of our situation. And this minister was no Tomas: he was clear and confident, he knew he had that answer, and I'd begun to feel a sense of grudging assent—not surrender but the first stirrings—when that picture appeared. And then I lost it.

Because I really disliked that painting. It seemed to me a typical Pre-Raphaelite production: garish, melodramatic, cloying in its technique and sentimentality; pretentious hum-bug. The contrast between Bergman's severe, honest art and this painting, on the same screen, chilled me. Was this what the minister held in his mind as the answer to all our problems—a kitschy figure from a calendar? I turned to Rob. "Let's get a pint."

But Rob was intent on this very image. Rapt. He barely glanced at me. "You go on."

That night—to some extent, that picture—changed his life. He enrolled in Bible classes at the church, and went on to become a missionary in Africa. The same night sent me in the opposite direction, at least for a time. But would a different painting—Caravaggio's "Conversion of St. Paul," for example—have kept me in the pew? We like to think of our beliefs, and disbeliefs, as founded on reason and close, thoughtful observation. Only in theory do we begin to suspect the power of aesthetics to shape our lives.

And what drew me back, some time later, toward the possibility of faith? Poetry. George Herbert and Gerard Manley Hopkins and T. S. Eliot. One night, I was reading the last lines of "Little Gidding" to a friend, my voice thick with emotion, and when I looked up he was staring at me with kindly amusement. "So," he said. "You really like that stuff?"

—*Tobias Wolff*

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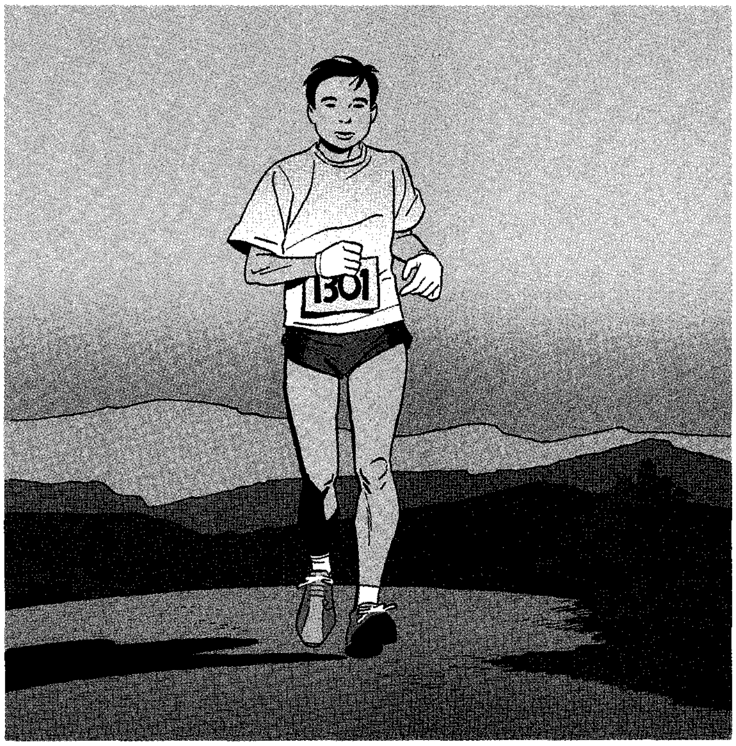
LIFE AND LETTERS

THE RUNNING NOVELIST

Learning how to go the distance.

BY HARUKI MURAKAMI



JAIME HERNANDEZ

A long time has passed since I started running on an everyday basis. Specifically, it was the fall of 1982. I was thirty-three then.

Not long before that, I was the owner of a small jazz club in Tokyo, near Sendagaya Station. Soon after leaving college—I'd been so busy with side jobs that I was actually a few credits short of graduating and was still officially a student—I had opened a little club near the south entrance of Kokubunji Station. The club had stayed there for about three years; then, when the building it was in closed for renovations, I moved it to a new location, closer to the center of Tokyo. The new venue wasn't big—we had a grand piano and just barely enough space to squeeze in a quintet. During the day, it was a café; at night, it was a bar. We served decent food, too, and, on weekends, featured live performances. This kind of club was still quite rare in Tokyo back then, so we gained a steady clientele and the place did all right financially.

Most of my friends had predicted that the club would fail. They figured that an establishment that was run as a kind of hobby couldn't succeed, and that someone like me—I was pretty naïve and, they suspected, didn't have the slightest aptitude for business—wouldn't be able to make a go of it. Well, their predictions were totally off. To tell the truth, I didn't think that I had much aptitude for business, either. I just figured that since failure was not an option, I had to give it everything I had. My strength has always been the fact that I work hard and can handle a lot physically. I'm more of a workhorse than a racehorse. I grew up in a white-collar household, so I didn't know much about entrepreneurship, but fortunately my wife's family ran a business and her natural intuition was a great help.

The work itself was hard. I was at the club from morning till night and I left there exhausted. I had all kinds of painful experiences and plenty of disappointments. But, after a while, I began to make enough of a profit to hire other people, and I was finally able to take a breather. To get started, I'd borrowed as much money as I could from every bank that would lend to me, and by now I'd paid a lot of it back. Things were settling down. Up to that point, it had been a question of sheer survival, and I hadn't had time to think about anything else. Now I felt as though I'd reached the top of a steep staircase and emerged into an open space. I was confident that I'd be able to handle any new problems that might crop up. I took a deep breath, glanced back at the stairs I'd just climbed, then slowly gazed around me and began to contemplate the next stage of my life. I was about to turn thirty. I was reaching the age at which I wouldn't be considered young anymore. And, pretty much out of the blue, it occurred to me to write a novel.

I can pinpoint the exact moment when it happened. It was at 1:30 P.M., April 1, 1978. I was at Jingu Stadium, alone in the outfield, watching a baseball game. Jingu Stadium was within walking distance of my apartment at the time, and I was a fairly devoted Yakult Swallows fan. It was a beautiful spring day, cloudless, with a warm breeze blowing. There were no benches in the outfield seating area back then, just a grassy slope. I was lying on the grass, sipping a cold beer, gazing up occasionally at the sky, and enjoying the game. As usual, the stadium wasn't very crowded. It was the season opener, and the Swallows were taking on the Hiroshima Carp. Takeshi Yasuda was pitching for the Swallows. He was a short, stocky pitcher with a wicked curveball. He easily retired the side in the top of the first inning. The lead-off batter for the Swallows was Dave Hilton, a young American player who was new to the team. Hilton got a hit down the left-field line. The crack of bat meeting ball echoed through the stadium. Hilton easily rounded first and pulled up to second. And it was at just that moment that a thought struck me: *You know what? I could try writing a novel.* I still remember the wide-open sky, the feel of the new grass, the satisfying crack of the bat. Something flew down from the sky at that instant, and, whatever it was, I accepted it.

I didn't have any ambition to be a "novelist." I just had the strong desire to write a novel. I had no concrete image of what I wanted to write about—just the conviction that I could come up with something that I'd find convincing. When I thought about sitting down at my desk at home and starting to write, I realized that I didn't even own a decent fountain pen. So I went to the Kinokuniya store in Shinjuku and bought a sheaf of manuscript paper and a five-dollar Sailor pen. A small capital investment on my part.

By that fall, I'd finished a two-hundred-page handwritten work. I had no idea what to do with it, so I just let the momentum carry me and submitted it to the literary magazine *Gunzo's* new-writers' contest. I shipped it off without making a copy, so it seems I didn't much care if it wasn't selected and vanished forever. I was more interested in having finished the book than in whether or not it would ever see the light of day.

That year, the Yakult Swallows, the perennial underdog, won the pennant and went on to defeat the Hankyu Braves in the Japan Series. I was really excited by this, and I attended several games at Korakuen Stadium. (Nobody had actually imagined that the Swallows would win, so their home venue, Jingu Stadium, had already been taken over by college baseball.) It was a particularly gorgeous autumn. The sky was clear and the ginkgo trees in front of the Meiji Memorial Gallery were more golden than I'd ever seen them. This was the last fall of my twenties.

By the following spring, when I got a phone call from an editor at *Gunzo* telling me that my novel had made the prize's short list, I'd completely forgotten having entered the contest. I'd been so busy with other things. But the novel went on to win the prize and was published that summer under the title "Hear the Wind Sing." It was well received, and, without really knowing what was going on, I suddenly found myself labelled a new, up-and-coming writer. I was surprised, but the people who knew me were even more surprised.

After this, while still running the jazz club, I produced a medium-length second novel, "Pinball, 1973." I also wrote a few short stories and translated some by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Both "Hear the Wind Sing" and "Pinball, 1973" were nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize, but in the end neither won. I didn't care one way or the other. If I had won the prize, I'd have been taken up by interviews and writing assignments, and I was afraid that this would interfere with my duties at the club.

For three years I ran my jazz club—keeping the accounts, checking the inventory, scheduling my staff, standing behind the counter mixing cocktails and cooking, closing up in the wee hours of the morning, and only then being able to write, at home, at the kitchen table, until I got sleepy. I felt as if I were living two people's lives. And, gradually, I found myself wanting to write a more substantial kind of novel. I had enjoyed the process of writing my first two books, but there were parts of both that I wasn't pleased with. I was able to write only in spurts, snatching bits of time—a half hour here, an hour there—and, because I was always tired and felt as if I were competing against the clock, I was never able to concentrate very well. With this scattered kind of approach I was able to write a few interesting, fresh things, but the result was far from complex or profound. I felt as if I'd been given this wonderful opportunity to be a novelist, and I had a natural desire to take that opportunity as far as I possibly could. So, after giving it a lot of thought, I decided to close the business and focus solely on writing. At this point, my income from the jazz club was significantly more than my income as a novelist, a reality to which I resigned myself.

Most of my friends were adamantly against my decision, or at least had doubts about it. "Your business is doing fine now," they said. "Why not just let someone else run it while you write your novels?" But I couldn't follow their advice. I'm the kind of person who has to commit totally to whatever I do. If, having committed, I failed, I could accept that. But I knew that if I did things halfheartedly and they didn't work out I'd always have regrets.

So, despite everyone's objections, I sold the club and, a little embarrassedly, hung out my sign as a novelist. "I'd just like to be free to write for two years," I explained to my wife. "If it doesn't work out, we can always open up another bar somewhere. I'm still young and we'll have time to start over." This was in 1981 and we

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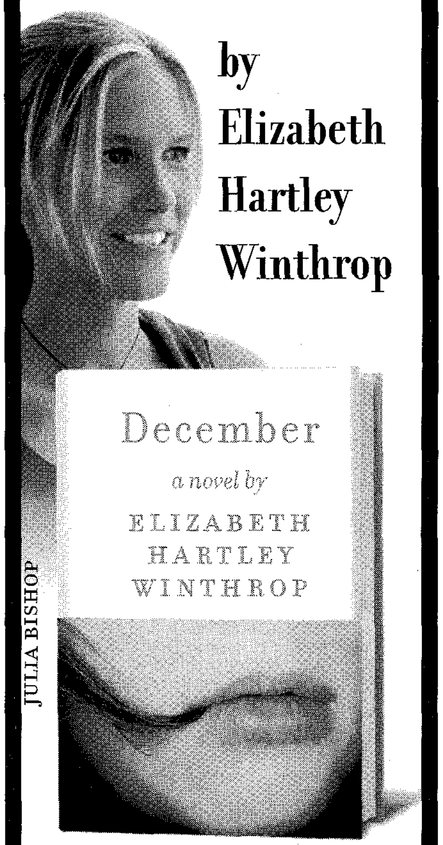
DECEMBER

by Elizabeth Hartley Winthrop



JULIA BISHOP

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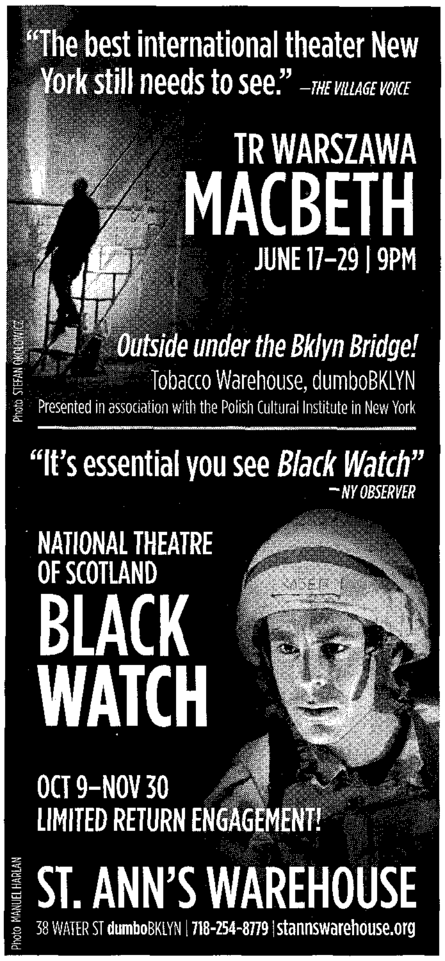
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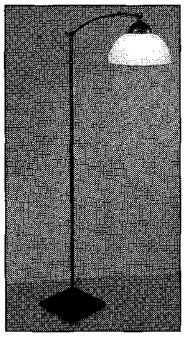
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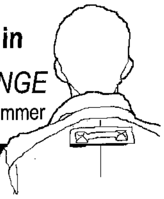
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still had a considerable amount of debt, but I figured I’d just do my best and see what happened.

So I settled down to write my novel and, that fall, travelled to Hokkaido for a week to research it. By the following April, I’d completed “A Wild Sheep Chase.” This novel was much longer than the previous two, larger in scope and more story-driven. By the time I’d finished writing it, I had a good feeling that I’d created my own style. Now I could actually picture myself making a living as a novelist.

The editors at *Gunzo* were looking for something more mainstream, and they didn’t much care for “A Wild Sheep Chase.” Readers, though, seemed to love the new book, and that was what made me happiest. This was the real starting point for me as a novelist.

Once I had decided to become a professional writer, another problem arose: the question of how to keep physically fit. Running the club had required constant physical labor, but once I was sitting at a desk writing all day I started putting on the pounds. I was also smoking too much—sixty cigarettes a day. My fingers were yellow, and my body reeked of smoke. This couldn’t be good for me, I decided. If I wanted to have a long life as a novelist, I needed to find a way to stay in shape.

As a form of exercise, running has a lot of advantages. First of all, you don’t need someone to help you with it; nor do you need any special equipment. You don’t have to go to any particular place to do it. As long as you have a pair of running shoes and a good road you can run to your heart’s content.

After I closed the bar, I resolved to change my life style entirely, and my wife and I moved out to Narashino, in the Chiba prefecture. The area was pretty rural back then, and there were no decent sports facilities around. But there was a Self-Defense Force base nearby, and the roads were well maintained. There was also a training area in the neighborhood near Nihon University, and if I went there early in the morning, when nobody else was around, I could use the track. So I didn’t have to think too much about what activity to choose. I just took up running.

Not long after that, I also quit smoking. It wasn’t easy to do, but I couldn’t really run and keep on smoking. My desire to run was a great help in overcoming the withdrawal symptoms. Quitting smoking was also like a symbolic gesture of farewell to the life I used to lead.

At school I had never much cared for gym class or Sports Day, since these involved activities that were forced on me from above. But whenever I was able to do something I liked to do, when I wanted to do it, and the way I wanted to do it, I’d give it everything I had. Since I wasn’t that athletic or coördinated, I wasn’t good at the kind of sports where things are decided in a flash. Long-distance running suits my personality better, which may explain why I was able to incorporate it so smoothly into my daily life. I can say the same thing about me and studying. For my entire education, from elementary school through college, I was never interested in things that I was forced to study. As a result, although my grades weren’t the kind you have to hide from people, I don’t recall ever being praised for a good performance or a good grade, or being the best in anything. I began to enjoy studying only *after* I had made it through the educational system and become a so-called “member of society.” If something interested me, and I could study it at my own pace, I was reasonably efficient at acquiring knowledge.

The best thing about becoming a professional writer was that I could go to bed early and get up early. When I was running the club, I often didn’t get to sleep until nearly dawn. The club closed at twelve, but then I had to clean up, go over the receipts, sit and talk, and have a drink to relax. Do all that and, before you know it, it’s 3 A.M. and sunrise is just around the corner. Often I’d still be sitting at my kitchen table, writing, as it started to get light outside. Naturally, by the time I woke up for the day, the sun was already high in the sky.

Once I began my life as a novelist, my wife and I decided that we’d go to bed soon after it got dark and wake up with the sun. To our minds, this was a more natural, respectable way to live. We also decided that from then on we’d try to see only the people we wanted to see, and, as much as possible, get by without seeing those we didn’t. We felt that, for a time at least, we could allow ourselves this modest indulgence.

In my new, simple, regular life, I got

up before 5 A.M. and went to bed before 10 P.M. Different people are at their best at different times of day, but I'm definitely a morning person. That's when I can focus. Afterward, I work out or do errands that don't take much concentration. At the end of the day, I relax, read, or listen to music. Thanks to this pattern, I've been able to work efficiently now for twenty-seven years. It's a pattern, though, that doesn't allow for much of a night life, and sometimes this makes relationships with other people problematic. People are offended when you repeatedly turn down their invitations. But, at that point, I felt that the indispensable relationship I should build in my life was not with a specific person but with an unspecified number of readers. My readers would welcome whatever life style I chose, as long as I made sure that each new work was an improvement over the last. And shouldn't that be my duty—and my top priority—as a novelist? I don't see my readers' faces, so in a sense my relationship with them is a conceptual one, but I've consistently considered it the most important thing in my life.

In other words, you can't please everybody.

Even when I ran the club, I understood this. A lot of customers came to the club. If one out of ten enjoyed the place and decided to come again, that was enough. If one out of ten was a repeat customer, then the business would survive. To put it another way, it didn't matter if nine out of ten people didn't like the club. Realizing this lifted a weight off my shoulders. Still, I had to make sure that the one person who did like the place *really* liked it. In order to do that, I had to make my philosophy absolutely clear, and patiently maintain that philosophy no matter what. This is what I learned from running a business.

After "A Wild Sheep Chase," I continued to write with the same attitude that I'd developed as a business owner. And with each work my readership—the one-in-ten repeaters—increased. Those readers, most of whom were young, would wait patiently for my next book to appear, then buy it and read it as soon as it hit the bookstores. This was for me the ideal, or at least a very comfortable, situation. I went on writing the kinds of things I wanted to write, exactly the way I wanted to write them, and, if that allowed me to make a living, then I couldn't ask for more. When my novel "Norwegian Wood" unexpectedly sold more than two million copies, things had to shift a little, but that was quite a bit later, in 1987.

When I first started running, I couldn't run long distances. I could run for only about twenty or thirty minutes. Even that left me panting, my heart pounding, my legs shaky. I hadn't really exercised for a long time. At first, I was also a little embarrassed to have people in the neighborhood see me running. But, as I continued to run, my body began to ac-

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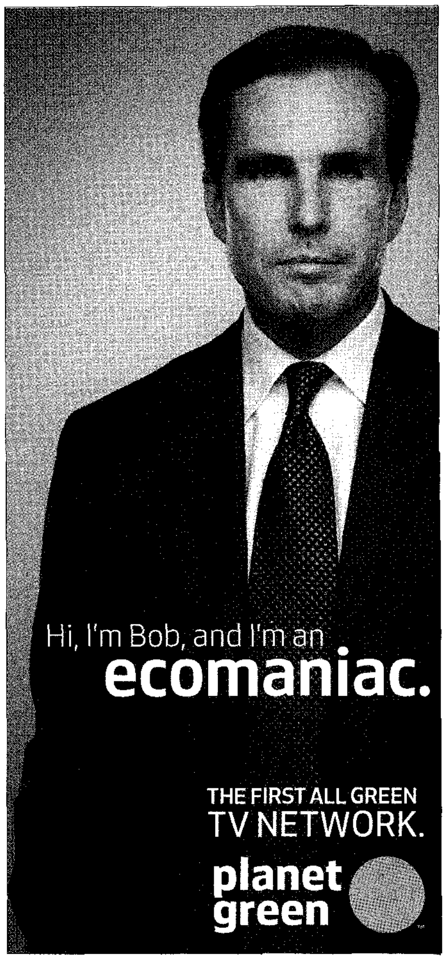

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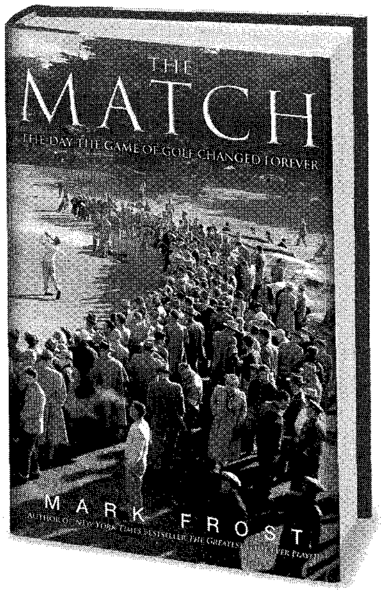

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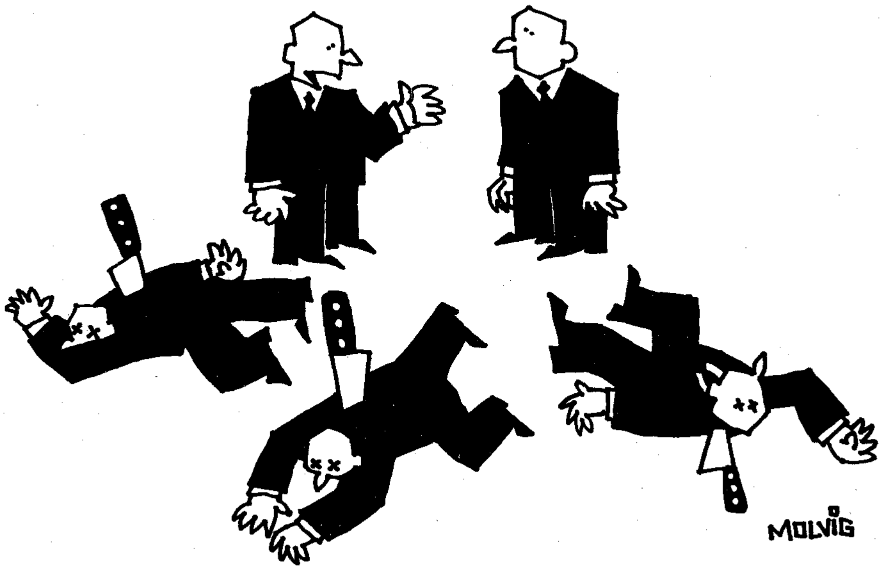


"Just being proactive."

• •

cept the fact that it was running, and I gradually increased my endurance. I acquired a runner's form, my breathing became more regular, and my pulse settled down. The main thing was not the speed or the distance so much as running every day, without fail.

So, like eating, sleeping, housework, and writing, running was incorporated into my daily routine. As it became a natural habit, I felt less embarrassed about it. I went to a sports store and purchased some running gear and some decent shoes. I bought a stopwatch, too, and read a book on running.

Looking back now, I think the most fortunate thing is that I was born with a strong, healthy body. This has made it possible for me to run on a daily basis for more than a quarter century now, competing in a number of races along the way. I've never been injured, never been hurt, and haven't once been sick. I'm not a great runner, but I'm a strong runner. That's one of the very few gifts I can be proud of.

The year 1983 rolled around and I participated in my first road race. It wasn't very long—a 5K—but for the first time I had a number pinned to my shirt and waited in a large group of other runners to hear an official shout, "On your mark, get set, go!" Afterward, I thought, Hey, that wasn't so bad! That May, I did a fifteen-kilometre race around Lake Yamanaka, and, in June, wanting to test how far I could go, I did laps around the Imperial Palace, in Tokyo. I went around seven times, for a total of 22.4 miles, at a fairly decent pace, and my legs didn't hurt at all. Maybe I could actually run a marathon, I concluded. Later, I found out the hard way that the toughest part of a marathon comes after twenty-two miles. (I have now competed in twenty-six marathons.)

When I look at photographs of me that were taken back in the mid-eighties, it's obvious that I didn't yet have a runner's physique. I hadn't run enough, hadn't built up the requisite muscles; my arms were too thin, my legs too skinny. I'm impressed that I could run a marathon at all with a body like that. (Now, after years of running, my musculature has changed completely.) But even then I could feel physical changes happening every day, which made me really happy. I felt that, even though I was past thirty, I and my body still had some possibilities left. The more I ran, the more my potential was revealed.

Along with this, my diet started to change as well. I began to eat mostly vegetables, with fish as my main source of protein. I had never liked meat much anyway, and this aversion now became even more pronounced. I cut back on rice and alcohol and began using only natural ingredients. Sweets weren't a problem, since I had never much cared for them.

When I think about it, having the kind of body that easily puts on weight is perhaps a blessing in disguise. In other words, if I don't want to gain weight I have to work out hard every day, watch what I eat, and cut down on indulgences. People who naturally keep the weight off don't need to exercise or watch their diet. Which is why, in many cases, their physical strength deteriorates as they age. Those of us who have a tendency to gain weight should consider ourselves lucky that the red light is so clearly visible. Of course, it's not always easy to see things this way.

I think this viewpoint applies as well to the job of the novelist. Writers who are blessed with inborn talent can write easily, no matter what they do—or don't do. Like water from a natural spring, the sentences just well up, and with little or no effort these writers can complete a work. Unfortunately, I don't fall into that category. I have to pound away at a rock with a chisel and dig out a deep hole before I can locate the source of my creativity. Every time I begin a new novel, I have to dredge out another hole. But, as I've sustained this kind of life over many years, I've become quite efficient, both technically and physically, at opening those holes in the rock and locating new water veins. As soon as I notice one source drying up, I move on to another. If people who rely on a natural spring of talent suddenly find they've exhausted their source, they're in trouble.

In other words, let's face it: life is basically unfair. But, even in a situation that's unfair, I think it's possible to seek out a kind of fairness.

When I tell people that I run every day, some are quite impressed. "You must have a lot of will power," they tell me. Of course, it's nice to be praised like this—a lot better than being disparaged. But I don't think it's merely will power that makes one able to do something. The world isn't that simple. To tell the truth, I don't even think there's much correlation between my running every day and whether or not I have will power. I think that I've been able to run for more than twenty-five years for one reason: it suits me. Or, at least, I don't find it all that painful. Human beings naturally continue doing things they like, and they don't continue doing what they don't like.

That's why I've never recommended running to others. If someone has an interest in long-distance running, he'll start running on his own. If he's not interested in it, no amount of persuasion will make any difference. Marathon running is not a sport for everyone, just as being a novelist isn't a job for everyone. Nobody ever recommended or even suggested that I be a novelist—in fact, some tried to stop me. I simply had the idea to be one, and that's what I did. People become runners because they're meant to.

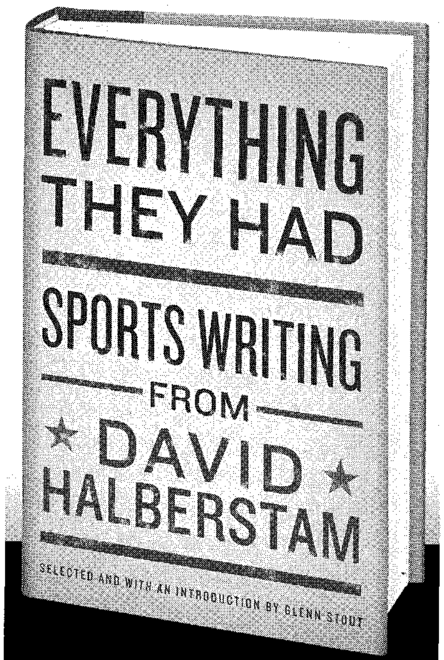
No matter how much long-distance running might suit me, of course there are days when I feel lethargic and don't want to do it. On days like that, I try to come up with all kinds of plausible excuses not to run. Once, I interviewed the Olympic runner Toshihiko Seko, just after he had retired from running. I asked him, "Does a runner at your level ever feel like you'd rather not run today?" He stared at me and then, in a voice that made it abundantly clear how stupid he thought the question was, replied, "Of course. All the time!"

Now that I look back on it, I can see what a dumb question it was. I guess that even back then I knew how dumb it was, but I wanted to hear the answer directly from someone of Seko's calibre. I wanted to know whether, although we were worlds apart in terms of strength and motivation, we felt the same way when we laced up our running shoes in the morning. Seko's reply came as a great relief. In the final analysis, we're all the same, I thought.

Now, whenever I feel like I don't want to run, I always ask myself the same thing: You're able to make a living as a novelist, working at home, setting your own hours. You don't have to commute on a packed train or sit through boring meetings. Don't you realize how fortunate you are? Compared with that, running an hour around the neighborhood is nothing, right? Then I lace up my running shoes and set off without hesitating. (I say this knowing full well that there are people who'd pick riding a crowded train and attending meetings over running every day.)

At any rate, this is how I started running. Thirty-three—that's how old I was then. Still young enough, though no longer a young man. The age that Jesus Christ died. The age that F. Scott Fitzgerald started to go downhill. It's an age that may be a kind of crossroads in life. It was the age when I began my life as a runner, and it was my belated, but real, starting point as a novelist. ♦

(*Translated, from the Japanese, by Philip Gabriel.*)



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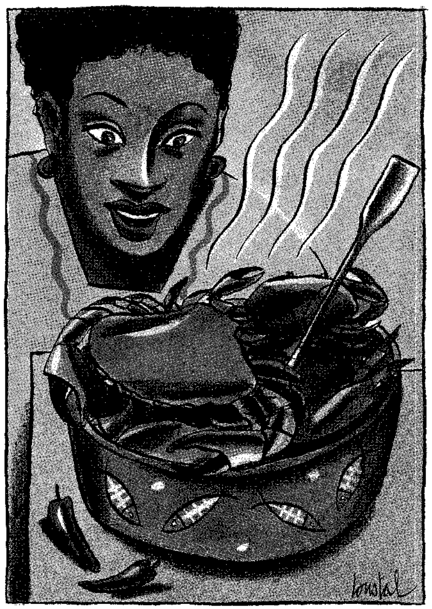
FAITH AND DOUBT

CRABS

One Sunday morning, when I was eight years old and living with my aunt and uncle in Haiti after my parents had emigrated to New York, I woke up in a house with no money and no food. My uncle was a minister in an impoverished neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, where most people, without the hope of remittances from relatives abroad, were even worse off than we were. Buying food on credit would have advertised our dire straits and was, for my very proud uncle, out of the question. At other times when we'd been forced to skip a meal or two—often because the price of food staples had suddenly doubled or tripled, quickly exhausting our resources—miracles had happened. My uncle's boss had come up with his overdue paycheck. A forgotten debt had been repaid to my aunt. The monthly allowance from my parents had arrived. Or, more often, one of my uncle's parishioners had appeared with a luscious-smelling pot of food.

For a miracle to occur again this time, my uncle told my cousins and me, all we needed to do was pray. And no one, when hungry, could pray louder or longer than I could. Mostly, I prayed out of terror. What if my parents and my aunt and uncle died unexpectedly, leaving me to scavenge through garbage heaps for food? But I also prayed with hope, because things had always worked out in the past. This, my uncle liked to say, was because we had exercised our faith. Our faith had moved mountains.

That Sunday morning, we gloomily dressed for church, then gathered around our dining-room table to pray. Sitting there between my aunt and uncle, I imagined one of the church's long-standing members, a large and boisterous woman we called Sè Victor (Victor being her husband's name), appearing with an enormous plate of sweet plantains, swimming in a codfish-and-onion stew. Or maybe a giant bowl of spaghetti speckled with chunks of tomatoes and herring. This was faith, my uncle had often hinted: feeling and tasting what you desired, as though it were already yours. That morning, the food I imagined for us was so real that when I opened my eyes I almost reached out and grabbed it.



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

These days, those who suffer from the dire hunger situation in Haiti refer to their condition as "Clorox" or "battery-acid" hunger, for the way it seems to erode their insides. I have never known hunger of that degree, but if you had asked me that morning how mine felt I might have used similar terms. At church, I sat close to my aunt, glancing up every now and then at her worried face, and wondering whether she might have overlooked a few gourdes, or at least a piece of candy, at the bottom of her purse.

Before the service ended, my aunt left the church alone. Later, we found out that she had searched the house for bottles, jars, clay pots, buckets, and containers and had bartered everything she found to the neighborhood water seller for a bag of cornmeal and a few ounces of cooking oil. By the time we got home, our plain cornmeal lunch was ready. And again we sat around the dining-room table, clasping hands, thanking God. Afraid that our neighbors might see what we were eating, my uncle pulled down the shades and locked the door, but, before we could take a bite, there was a knock.

It was Man Gabriel, my aunt's cousin, who was not a member of the church but was one of the best cooks in the family. She had brought us a big bowl of crabs, stewed with crushed eggplants and garlic gloves. "I made too much," she said, allowing us some dignity. No one had too much crab lying around, any more than they had too much gold. She had probably heard about my aunt's cornmeal barter and had decided to help us supplement it with the crab, the most luxurious of Sunday foods. As we feasted, I was sure that I had single-handedly brought about this miracle—that it was *my* prayers that had been so generously answered.

That is, until halfway through the meal, when I became violently ill, vomiting so forcefully that I could barely get up from the table. I jolted, doubled over, to the bathroom. The stomach cramps I experienced that day were a thousand times worse than my hunger pangs had been, and by the time I collapsed, dehydrated, on my bed, the thought of never eating again seemed relatively pleasant.

One of my cousins, who was a neighborhood nurse, guessed—correctly—that, since no one else had got sick, I had developed an allergy to crab. And though there were a few more missed meals to come, I never prayed for food again.

—*Edwidge Danticat*

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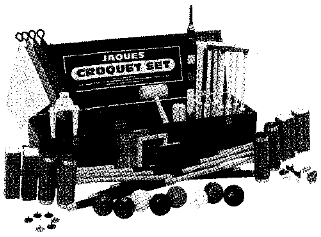

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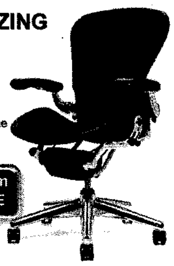

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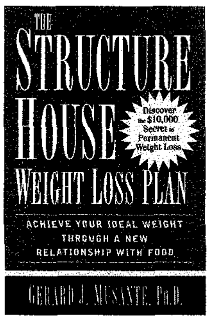
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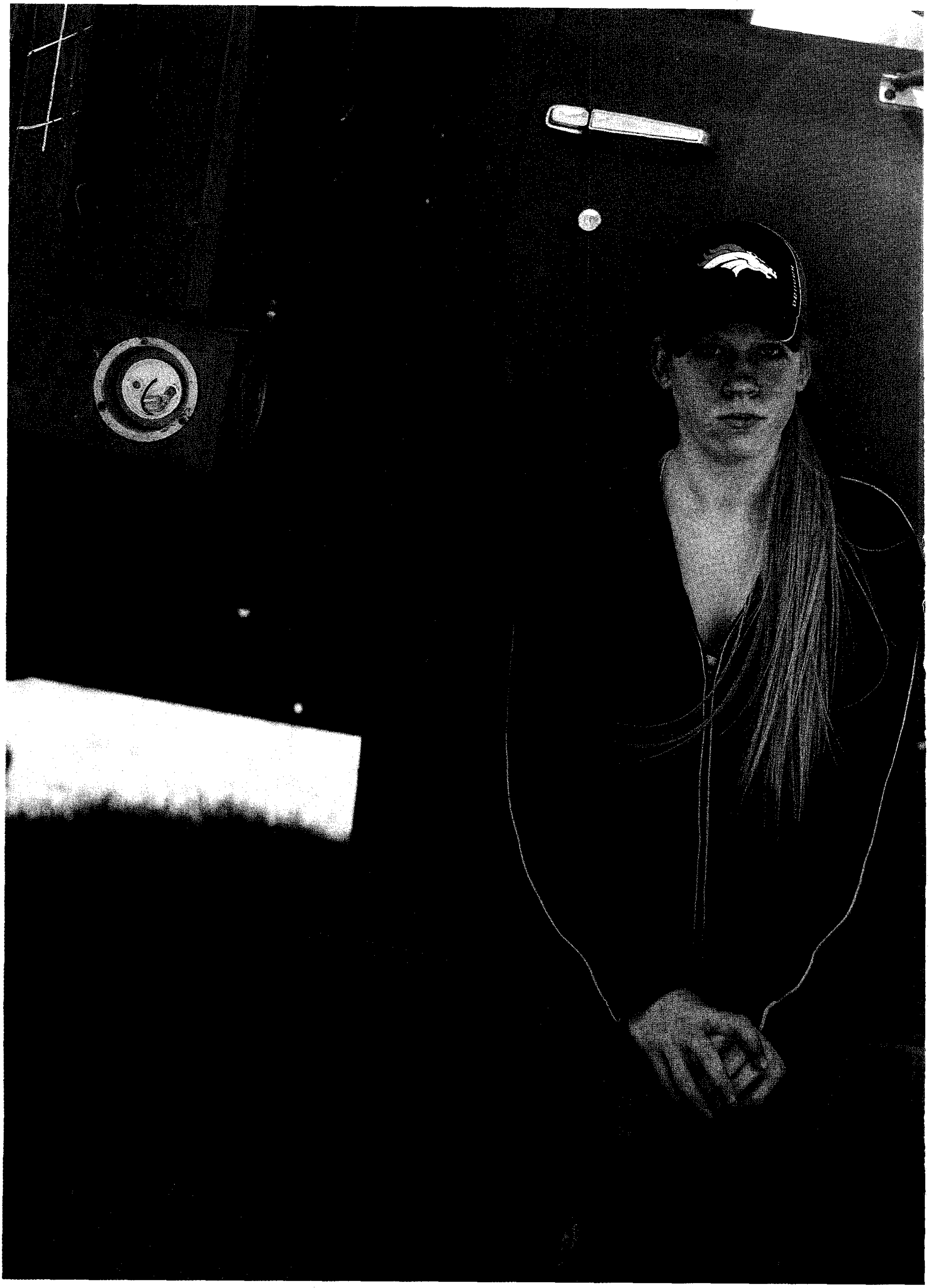
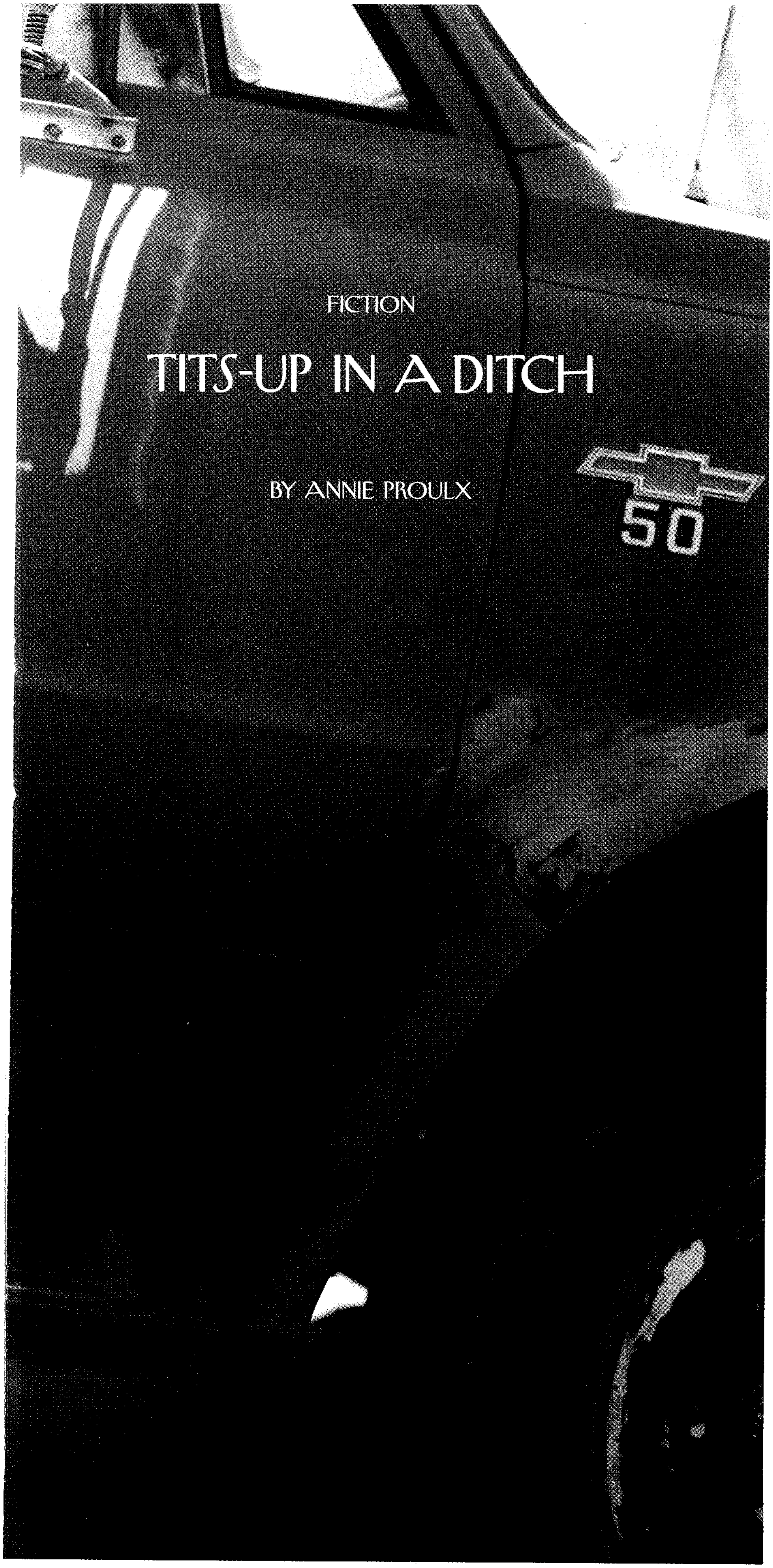


RICHARD RENALDI, "UNTITLED" FROM THE PLAINS (2005)/YOSSI MILO GALLERY

FICTION

TITS-UP IN A DITCH

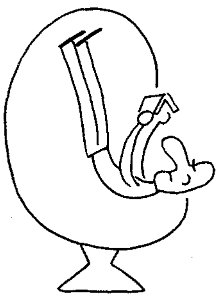
BY ANNIE PROULX



Her mother had been knockout beautiful and no good, and Dakotah had heard this from the time she could recognize words. People said that Shaina Lister, with aquamarine eyes and curls the shining maroon of water-birch bark, had won all the kiddie beauty contests and then had become the high-school slut, knocked up when she was fifteen and cutting out the day after Dakotah was born, slinking and wincing, still in her hospital johnny, down the back stairs of Mercy Maternity to the street, where one of her greasy pals picked her up and headed west for Los Angeles. It was the same day the television evangelist Jim Bakker, an exposed and confessed adulterer, resigned from his Praise the Lord money mill, his fall mourned by Bonita Lister, Shaina's mother. Bonita's husband, Verl, blamed the television for Shaina's wildness and for her hatred of the ranch.

"She seen it was O.K. on the teevee and so she done it," he said. He wanted to get rid of the set, but Bonita said there was no sense in locking up the horse after the barn burned down.

Verl and Bonita Lister were in their late thirties and stuck with the baby. If it had been a boy, Verl said, letting the words squeeze out around his roll-yer-own, he could have helped with the chores when he got to size. And inherited the ranch was the implied finish to the sentence. Verl had named Dakotah after his homesteading great-grandmother, born in the territory, married and widowed and married again only after she had proved up on her land and the deed was in her name and in her hand. At a time when the mourning period for a husband was two or three years, and for a wife three months, she had worn black for her first husband an insulting six weeks before taking up a homestead claim. Verl treasured a photograph showing her with the deed, standing in front of her neat clapboard house, a frowsy white dog leaning against her checkered skirt. She held one hand behind her back, and Verl said this was because she smoked a pipe. Dakotah was almost sure she could see a wisp of smoke curling up, but Bonita said it was just dust raised by the wind. Since that pioneer time, the country had become trammelled and gnawed, stippled with cattle, coal mines, oil wells, and gas rigs, striated with pipelines. The road to the ranch had been named Sixteen Mile, though no one was sure what that distance signified.



Bottle-blond Bonita (her great-grandfather had been a squaw man, and black hair was in the genes) made an early grandmother. Ranch-raised and -trained, she counted the grandchild as a difficulty that had to be met. She was used to praising thankless work as the right and good way, but what she was going to do without Jim Bakker's exhortation and encouragement she didn't know. First, an impaired husband, the endless labor and (sometimes forced) good humor that were expected of women, then a bad-girl daughter, and now the bad girl's baby to raise. Verl Lister was burden enough. By himself, he could not run the ranch, and they often had to ask their neighbors to throw together and give them a hand. Of course, it was because he had been a wild boy in his youth, had rodeoed hard, a bareback rider who suffered falls, hyperextensions, and breaks that had bloomed into arthritis and aches as he aged. A trampling had broken his pelvis and legs, so that now he walked with the crouch of a bagpipe player. She could not fault him for ancient injuries, and remembered him as the curly-headed young man with beautiful eyes sitting on his horse, back straight as a metal fence post. But a man, she thought, was supposed to endure pain, cowboy up, and not bitch about it all day long. She, too, had arthritis in her left knee, but she suffered in silence.

Throughout the nineteen-eighties, it was a puzzle where all the able-bodied labor had gone. During the energy boom, oil companies had sucked up Wyoming boys, offering high wages that no one else, not even Wyatt Match, the county's richest rancher, could pay. When the bust came, there were still no ranch hands for hire. "You'd think," Verl said, "with all them oil companies pullin out there'd be fifty guys on every corner lookin for work." But the hands, after their taste of roustabout money, had followed the dollar away from Wyoming.

Verl was a trash rancher, Wyatt Match said, oyster eyes sliding around behind his gold-rimmed lenses that darkened in sunlight, and not so much because Verl's land was overgrazed but because there were fences down and gates hanging by one hinge, binder twine everywhere and rusting machinery in the pastures. There was an old sedan with the hood up in one of the irrigation ditches. A defunct electric stove rested on the front porch. The Lister cows roamed the roads, constantly suffered accidents—drowning in the creek in spring flood, bogging in mud pots that came from nowhere.

Spring was the hardest time, the weather alternating between blizzards and Saharan heat. On a snow-whipped evening, Dakotah setting the table for supper, Verl said a cow who had tried to climb a steep, wet slope that apparently slid out from under her had landed on her back in the ditch.

"Had me some luck today. Goddam cow got herself tits-up in the ditch couple days ago. Dead, time I found her," he said in a curiously satisfied tone, squinting through faded lashes, winking his eyes, the same aquamarine as those of the wayward Shaina.

"Not every man would say that is luck," Bonita said wearily. She went to the sink, stepping over Bum, Verl's ancient heeler crippled by cow kicks, and began scrubbing out the only pot large enough to boil potatoes in quantity, a pot she washed and used several times a day.

"It is, in a way of speakin."

She couldn't have puzzled that one out even if she had had the time. With Verl, it was one thing after another. He went into the national forest to cut wood every fall, and she knew that he someday would cut himself in half with his cranky old chain saw. She almost hoped he would.

For Verl Lister everything turned on luck, and he had experienced very little of the good kind. His secret boyhood dream had been to become a charismatic radio man, meeting singing personalities, giving the news, announcing songs, describing the weather. All this ambition grew from a small, cheap radio he had earned as a boy selling Rosebud salve, riding from ranch to ranch on an aged mare. In bed at night, he put it under the covers and turned it whisper low, listening to honey-voiced Paul Kallinger on a high-watt border station and the lonely-hearts-club ads, pitches for tonics and elixirs, yodelling cowboys, and, by the time he was in his teens, Wolfman Jack, with his scandalous sex talk and his panting and howls. Yet he had never wanted to be like Wolfman Jack. Kallinger was his ideal.

He had no idea how to get into the radio game, and the plan faded as he grew into work on the home ranch. For fun he rode broncs, the source of his present miseries. He still kept the radio in his truck on constantly, had a radio in every room of the house despite the region's bad reception. But the stations were pale imitations of the old border blasters of his youth. When NPR came to Wyoming, in the nineteen-seventies, he judged it dull and hoity-toity.

Growing up, Wyatt Match had been given every advantage. He'd had good horses from the time he could walk, trips abroad, hand-tooled boots. He went to an Eastern prep school and then to the University of Pennsylvania. After graduation, he came back to Wyoming with one or two ideas about agricultural progress and tried too soon to get into the legislature when the times favored conservative, frugal ranchers as political leaders, not spendthrift rich men, a label his father's private golf course had burned into an envious population. Over the years, he had become a sharp-horned archconservative with a hard little mind. After his youthful start flirting with useless ideas sown by the Eastern professors, he had dedicated himself to maintaining the romantic heritage of the nineteenth-century ranch, Wyoming's golden time. Descended from Irish stock, he had milky skin that flamed with sunburn, and his ginger hair had turned a saintly white. His pride was a blue neon sign—"Match Ranch"—near his post-and-lintel gate that was large enough to be the torii of a Shinto shrine. After years of trying, he had finally made it into the state legislature. Local people were used to seeing his dusty Silverado bulge out onto the road and pass them on the right, throwing up a storm of gravel.

There was a tinge of superiority in all that he said, even in meaningless comments about the weather. Match seemed to indicate that blizzards, windstorms, icy roads, and punishing hail were for other people; he moved in a cloud of different, special weather. In the days when he was trying to push his way into the legislature with his radical ideas, a well-respected older rancher took him aside and told him, stressing his words, that Wyoming was fine *just the way it was*. Gradually, he learned the truth of that statement.

His political value increased after he married Debra Gale Sunchley, a Wyoming ranchwoman, a hard worker with a built-in capacity for endurance, who dressed in crease-ironed jeans, boots, and an old Carhartt jacket. The first Sunchley had come to Wyoming with the 11th Ohio Volunteers to fight Indians during the Civil War.

Debra Gale Sunchley Match was secretary-treasurer of the Cow Belles, and a member of the Christian Women's Book Circle. Debra Gale had read no more than ten books in her life, but she knew she had as much right as anyone to give her opinion. After Wyatt divorced her to marry Carol Shovel, whom he had met on a California golf vacation, Debra Gale and her brother Tuffy stayed on as joint ranch managers. Match built his ex-wife her own house on the property, a simple one-story ranch with a big shed for her nine dogs. He paid her a wage. She was a good worker, and he wasn't going to let her go.

As Dakotah grew up, the Lister ranch staggered along, Bonita making ends meet, worrying about money and Verl's health. The only free time she had was when she knelt at the side of the bed saying her prayers, asking for the strength to go on and for her husband's well-being.

"Don't let yourself get old before your time," she said impatiently to Verl, who seemed to look forward to old age. It took half an hour in the morning for him to limber up his joints. It irritated her that the child, Dakotah, had little interest in riding or rodeo, resisted 4-H meetings. Bonita could always think of some task or job for the girl, whether it was collecting eggs, picking over beans, or discovering the section of broken fence where the cows got out. Scraping the burned toast for Verl was the most hated task. Verl insisted on toast but would not part with the money for a toaster.

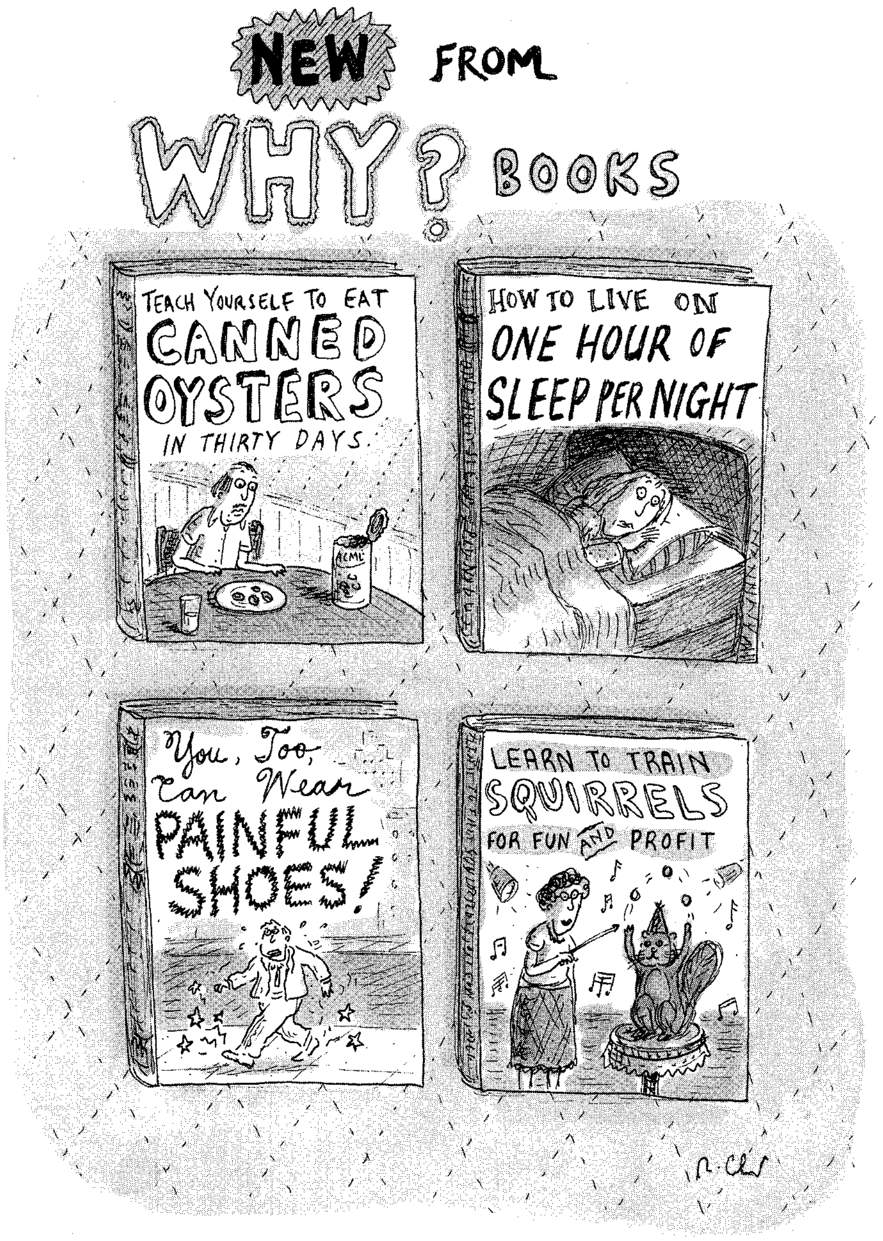
"My mother made good toast on the griddle," he said. "It come already buttered." But Bonita often burned the toast as she tried to cook eggs and hash, forgetting the smoking bread. Dakotah rasped the charcoal into the sink with a table knife.

Once, moved by some filament of need for affection, Dakotah tried to hug Bonita, who was scrubbing potatoes in the sink. Bonita briskly shoved her away. Sometimes Dakotah wandered around the ranch on foot, usually heading for a steep pine slope with a tiny spring, the ground littered with old gray bones from a time when a mountain lion had had her den beneath a fallen tree. Bonita herself never went for a walk, a wasteful dereliction of duty. She worked spring branding with the men and still managed dinner for all the hands, was back on a horse at November sale time overseeing the cows prodded into cattle trucks with Swiss-cheese sides, while Verl cut winter wood in the forest. Verl walked nowhere, was always in his truck when he wasn't in the reclining chair he favored. He'd come into the house and sigh. "Well, I had me some luck today," he'd say in his plaintive voice.

She waited. What followed might be one of his slowly unwinding stories that went nowhere, wasted her time.

"Filled up the gas can, got up there in the woods, and damned if the can hadn't tipped over and spilled out all the gas."

Yes, it was. He was speaking in his portentous, I've-got-grave-news voice. She nodded and scraped carrots, making the orange fibre fly. She was still in her red pajama bottoms, but had pushed the heifers out of the east pasture, mended a broken section of fence, got the mail, fed the bum lambs, and was now cooking dinner. There had been no time to pull on a pair of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jeans. She wasn't going to town anyway.

"And then I got to workin awhile and the chain broke."

"Well, you surely had problems." Once, oppressed by Verl's self-pitying complaints, she had considered poisoning him. But they carried no insurance, and how she would manage alone she didn't know. Then, too, she never forgot the joyous winter when they were courting, the long freezing drive in from the ranch in a truck with a broken heater to meet him at the Double Arrow Café. Her teeth chattering, she would walk from the snowy street into the wonderfully hot and noisy bar, Russ Eftink punching G5 again and again to make "Blue Bayou" play continuously, and Verl, the tough handsome cowboy, slouching across the room toward her and pulling her into the music. Into the pot went the carrots, and she started on the potatoes with an ancient peeler that had been in the kitchen since Verl's great-grandmother's day.

His voice lifted. "And my chest didn't hurt today the way it done yesterday."

"Uh-huh." She rinsed the potatoes and cubed them so they would cook faster.

"I supposed to go see her, that doctor, tomorrow mornin at ten minutes before eight. I don't know if I should now. Seein it didn't hurt today."

"Well, Verl, it might a been a matter a luck, don't you think? That it didn't hurt and you workin so hard."

He squinted at her, trying to tell if she was being sarcastic. "It's just I don't want a leave you all alone, and me dead of a heart attack," he said sanctimoniously.

She said nothing.

"So I guess I better go." It was what he'd intended to do from the beginning.

Wyatt Match thought Verl Lister's dilapidated place gave Wyoming ranchers a slob name. He personally thanked heaven that Lister was not on the main road. He often quoted Robert Frost's line "Good fences make good neighbors" without understanding the poem or the differences of intent between those who made fences of stone and those who used barbed wire. He had picked the Listers to criticize, and whether it was Verl's work habits, or the way he never looked straight at anyone except in the left eye, or Bonita's aqua rayon pants suit, Wyatt Match made them out to be the county fools. In truth, Verl Lister's cows were wild and rough because they were rarely worked; they suffered parasites, hoof rot, milk fever, prolapses, and hernias; they were shot by rifle and by bow and arrow; they fell on T-posts, ate wire, coughed and snuffled, stumbled into streams and drowned. Verl referred to Match as "him and his click—them bastards pretty much run things the way they want." Yet if he met Match at a cattle sale or at the feed store he would smile and greet him cordially. And Match, in turn, would say, "How're you, Verl?"

Verl resented Match, but it was Match's second wife, Carol, whom he truly detested. She was a California woman with red eyebrows and foxy hair, clothed in revealing dresses and garnished with clanking bracelets. Carol Match had endless recipes for Wyoming's betterment: bring back the train or start up a bus line for public transportation; invite black people and Asians to move in and improve ethnic diversity; shift the capital to Cody; make the state attractive to moviemakers and computer commuters. It got around that she had said Wyoming people were lazy. *Lazy!* Verl was outraged. Although he himself avoided as much work as he could, it was because he was half crippled and it was bad for his heart. The whole world, except this California bitch, knew that there were no more frugal, thrifty, and hardworking people on the face of the earth than those in Wyoming. Work was almost holy, good physical labor done cheerfully and for its own sake, the center of each day, the node of Wyoming life. That and toughing it out when adversity struck, accepting that it was not necessary to wear a seat belt, because when it was time for you to go you went. Not being constrained by a seat belt was the pioneer spirit of freedom.

"I'd sure tell *her* where to set her empties, but you can't tell nobody like that nothin," he said to Bonita. "She is too ignorant. It would just be water off a duck's ass."

One day in the auto-parts store, where Carol Match was checking to see if her order for a side-window sunscreen for the restored 1948 Chevy half-ton had come in, he listened to her talking to Chet Breen behind the counter. She was wearing a tiny blue skirt, with the hem just below her fatty buttocks, and a silky top that showed off her robust tanned breasts.

"They have got to put a traffic light at that intersection. Somebody is going to get killed one day." Her bracelets rattled.

"Always been O.K. the way it is. Just got to be a little bit careful. People here never had no trouble with it." Breen looked at her chest for a few seconds, then looked away, then again let his gaze slide down into the cleft.

"The place needs some new people," she said.

Verl understood that she didn't just mean importing strangers. She meant an exchange. For every California fool she brought in, a native would be removed. He was sure she had a list, and that he was on it. Breen said nothing, and that, thought Verl, had probably got him on the list, too.

"Wyomin is fine just the way it is," Verl said to Bonita. "They come in here and . . ."

For Dakotah, kindergarten was packed with revelations. On the first day the teacher, a fat woman with a pink, hairy sweater, asked the children for their birthdays.

"We'll have a party each time it is somebody's birthday," she said with false excitement. Each child named a date, but Dakotah was confused. The boy next to her said, "December nine."

The teacher looked expectantly at Dakotah.

"December nine," she whispered.

"Oh, class! Did you hear that? Dakotah has the same birthday as Billy! That's so wonderful! We'll have a double birthday party! Two children have the same birthday! We'll have two cakes!"

Riding home in the truck with Bonita, she asked if she had a birthday and if it was December nine.

"Well, of course. Everbody has a birthday! Yours is April 1st, April Fools' Day. That's when you play mean tricks on somebody. Like the April Fool trick your mother pulled on us. Why do you want to know?"

Dakotah explained that the teacher wanted to make parties at school, with cakes and games. And she didn't know her birthday. And there was a song.

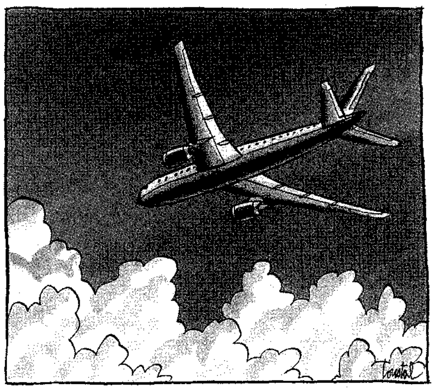
"Well, we never went in for that birthday stuff. We don't do such foolishness. No wonder the school is always runnin out a money if they spend it on cakes."

In school, she learned again what she already knew: that she was differ-

FAITH AND DOUBT

MYSTERIES OF FLIGHT

Since childhood, I have lived in two completely different worlds: the world of Islam and that of the Christian West. I grew up in Kumasi, Ghana. On weekdays, I attended the local Catholic primary school; weekends I spent at the madrassa, where I memorized verses from Islam's holy book, the Koran.



The *mudir*, or headmaster, of the madrassa, who was also my uncle, was named Ustaz Salman. Ustaz was a man whose high intellect and theological wizardry made him somewhat imperious and impatient with the slow or dyslexic among his students. But, of all my uncle's eccentric and belligerent characteristics, the one that stood out the most for me was his love-hate relationship with the West.

This was a man who every day read the two main English-language newspapers in the country; he also listened to the BBC news three times a day, as if the broadcasts from Bush House, London, breathed oxygen into his lungs. He often expressed admiration for Western achievements in science and technology, but he was also fond of insisting that none of the advances made by the West had ever outsmarted death. One day, I heard my uncle tell the assistant *mudir* that his lack of faith in the West arose from the simple fact that the white man couldn't make electricity shock-free. In my uncle's view, something that gives light, energy, and even life should not also harm or kill. This perceived failure alone was enough to cast doubt in Uncle's mind over the entirety of Western civilization.

My uncle's skepticism, as irrational as it was logical and theological, was founded on the belief that Western science could never attain perfection; perfection could be achieved solely by the one and only Allah. And yet Uncle Ustaz did believe that the West had come close to perfection in the field of aviation. He marvelled at the fact that something as heavy as a jet plane, with all its cargo, could stay in the air for such a long time. When I was about eleven, Uncle started disseminating a theory that went like this: airplanes are able to take off from the ground and remain in the firmament only because aviation engineers worldwide recite a special prayer verse from the Koran before each plane departs. In 1982, Uncle Ustaz took a trip to Nigeria, and, when he returned, he claimed to have seen something that proved his theory: an aviation engineer, "a white man he was," placed a hand on one of the plane's tires and read aloud from a small Koran just as the plane was preparing for takeoff. Soon, the story of the Koran-reciting aviation engineer became an article of faith in my city's Muslim community; it had finally been shown that the white man was powerless without the aid of Almighty Allah.

In 1988, I left Ghana to attend high school and then college in the United States. Here, I came to see that my uncle's convictions were born of fear and cynicism, and of an inability to comprehend a phenomenon that was completely over his head. Now, after twenty years in the United States, thousands of miles from my uncle's madrassa, I have developed my own mind-set about faith. I still have faith in the religion of my birth, albeit in a more philosophical sense; I also have trust in other religions, and faith in science and technology. And, just like my uncle, I find that the reality of jet travel never ceases to amaze me. But, while my faith in aviation science is resolute (I am usually confident, whenever I fly, that the plane will land safely at the other end), there remains in me a lurking fear that anything could happen, that the plane and all its complex, efficient systems could suddenly become susceptible to the whims of the weather or the wrath—or the mercy—of Allah.

Luckily for me, such doubts, instead of inspiring me to develop theories like my uncle's, have guided me toward accepting faith and doubt as inseparable twins. One's devotion to something cannot be truly steadfast until it has withstood moments of doubt, for the plain reason that nothing is perfect—everything on earth is vulnerable to outside forces that can divert it from its intended or natural course. I remember once hearing a NASA official give an interview during a space shuttle's pre-liftoff. "We have done all we need to do on our end," the official told the media. "We have crossed all our 't's and dotted all our 'i's, and the shuttle is ready for liftoff. And at this point it is in the hands of God and very good weather."

—*Mohammed Naseehu Ali*

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

"I hope I can still count on an endorsement."

• •

ent from others, unworthy of friends.

The Listers did their duty, raising Dakotah, Bonita making peanut-butter sandwiches for her school lunch while listening to "Morning Glory." The radio voices roared in the bathroom, where Verl crouched on the toilet with chronic constipation. His chest pain, which often migrated to some remote interior organ, where it pulsed and gnawed, had long baffled the young woman doctor from India, who tried to fit into the rural life by uncomprehendingly attending the local amusements of fishing derbies, calcuttas, poker runs, and darts tournaments.

"You see Jimmy Mint catch that three-hundred-dollar fish?" she asked, to put Verl at ease. He preferred to describe his torments in exquisite detail, drawing the devious path of a pain with his finger, tracking across his chest, down to his groin, around to the side and back again, rising to the throat.

At last the doctor sent Verl to Salt Lake City for advanced tests. Bonita went with him after arranging for Dakotah to stay with Pastor Alf Crashbee and his wife, Marva.

Dakotah, then seven years old, stood shyly in the hallway while Bonita and Marva Crashbee talked. Mrs. Crashbee spoke in emphatic phrases to set up her salient points. She puffed her cheeks and her nostrils flared. As Dakotah waited to be told what to do, she fell in love with a candy dish. The single piece of furniture in the hallway was a long, narrow table. On its gleaming surface rested Mrs. Crashbee's car keys. At the farthest end was a small blue plate, close to a saucer in size, and shaped like a fish. On it were seven or eight watermelon-flavored Jolly Rancher candies. It was the amusing shape and color of the dish that entranced, its variegated blues ranging from cobalt to flushes of teal. Mrs. Crashbee noticed her gaping and told her to help herself, thinking that the poor thing probably never had much candy. After Bonita left, she said it again, in a spasm of urging.

"Go *ahead!* Help your*self*."

Dakotah took a Jolly Rancher and unwrapped it, not sure where to put the wrapper. The pastor's wife led the way into the kitchen and pointed at a chrome can. When Dakotah tried to lift the lid, the pastor's wife motioned her away, trod on a foot pedal, and the lid flew open. This, too, was novel. Dakotah blushed with shame, because she had not known about the foot pedal. At her grandparents' house, trash went into a paper grocery bag that sat on a newspaper.

Bonita returned to pick her up. She told Mrs. Crashbee that Verl's tests showed serious arthritis in his joints and lumps of bone where old breaks had healed badly, but that not much could be done. He needed a whole new skeleton, and his heart was weak. A bull had stepped on his chest when he was twenty and bruised his heart. They told him just to take it easy.

"He's at home resting this very minute," Bonita said.

On the way out, Dakotah's coat sleeve somehow brushed the blue dish off the hall table. Jolly Ranchers skittered along the floor like pale-red nuts.

"For pity's sake," Bonita said, bending down to pick up the broken pieces. "Clumsy as a calf." Mrs. Crashbee, shaking her head and thrusting out her chin, said, "It is *noth*ing, just an *old cheap dish*." But her tone implied that it had been part of a set of Royal Worcester. Bonita gave Dakotah a good leg whipping when they got home.

Mrs. Crashbee had a microwave oven that had magically heated the soup for lunch. When Dakotah described this marvel to Bonita a few days later, Verl, who was listening from his chair in the living room, snorted and shouted that he guessed he would stick with the good old kitchen stove. It was a way of saying that there would be no microwave oven for Bonita, who had shown some interest in Dakotah's description.

Thin and with colorless brown-gray hair and grayish eyes, yet with a boy-size nose and chin, and no trace of her mother's vivid beauty, Dakotah hunched over and kept to herself at school, was considered somewhat slow by her teachers.

When she was in the fourth grade, Sherri Match brought four kittens to school. "They're for free," Sherri said. "You can choose."

Dakotah instantly wanted the tiny black one with white paws and a diminutive tail that stood straight up. She smoothed him, and he purred.

"You can have him," Sherri said grandly, dispenser of munificence.

She brought the kitten home under her sweater, where he scratched and wriggled, terribly strong for such a small creature. In the kitchen, she gave him a saucer of milk. He sneezed, then drank greedily. Bonita said nothing, but her expression was chill.

"Where'd that cat come from?" Verl demanded at supper.

“Sherri Match was givin kitties away.”

“I bet she was,” Verl said grimly. “Well, it can’t stay here. Cats give me asthma. I’ll take it back to them goddam Matches.” And he picked up the kitten and strode out to the truck.

At school the next day, Dakotah mumbled to Sherri that she was sorry her granddad had brought the kitten back. “He said cats give him asmar.”

Sherri looked at her. “He didn’t bring it back. He didn’t come to our house. What’s asmar?”

When she approached her teens, the leg whippings stopped. Bonita seemed to soften through time or remorse. Yet as Dakotah filled out her grandparents became very watchful. She was not allowed to go to anyone’s house, or to walk to and from school. Social nights were out, and Bonita told her there would be no dating, as that was the way her mother had been ruined. All around them the gas fields opened up, and Verl squinted down the road to see if EnCana or British Petroleum was coming to free him from poverty.

She was curious about her mother. “Didn’t you save any of her stuff?” she asked Bonita after a secret rummage through the attic.

“No, I didn’t. I burned those whorish clothes and the stupid pictures she pasted on the walls. She was kind of crazy is what I come to figure. Always makin some mess or doin some outlandish thing. She never did nothin in the kitchen except one time she cooked a whole pot a Minute rice, caught a trout in the stock pond, and cut off a piece a that raw trout and laid it on the rice and *ate it*. Raw. I about gagged. That’s the kind a thing she did. Crazy stuff.”

Dakotah, knowing herself to be unattractive, was too eager to please, hungry beyond measure for affection. She was ready to love anyone. Sash Hicks, a skinny boy dressed perpetually in camouflage clothing, with a face and body that seemed to have been broken and then realigned, noticed her, attracted to her shy silence. She responded with long, intense stares when she thought he wasn’t looking, and daydreams that never went farther than swooning kisses. One day Mr. Lewksberry, the history teacher, in an effort to make his despised subject more interesting, pandered to the local definition of “history” by assigning his students an essay on Western outlaws. In the school library, turning the pages of the “Encyclopedia of Western Badmen,” Dakotah came upon a photograph of Billy the Kid. It seemed as if Sash Hicks were looking up from the page, the same smirky triumph in the face, the slouched posture and dirty pants. Now, in her daydreams, they rode away together, Sash twisting back in the saddle to shoot at their pursuers, Verl and Bonita. In real life, they began to think of themselves as a couple, meeting in hallways, sitting near each other in classes, exchanging notes. At home, she kept Sash a secret.

At the beginning of their senior year, Sash Hicks made up his mind. No judge of character, he gauged her a biddable handmaiden who would look to his comforts. He said, “Let’s get married,” and she agreed. She expected her grandparents would boil with rage when they heard the news. She said it quickly at the dinner table. But they were pleased.

“You’ll get along good with Sash,” Verl said, jovial with relief that she would soon be off his hands.

“Too bad Shaina didn’t think a that, might a saved her,” Bonita mumbled. Their approval was the closest thing to praise they had ever bestowed on Dakotah.

She dropped out of school a few months before graduation. The school counsellor, Mrs. Lenski, middle-aged and with murky blue eyes outlined in brown, tried to persuade her to finish. “Oh, I know how you feel. I completely understand that you want to get married, but, believe me, you will *never*, *never* regret finishing school. If you should have to get a job or if trouble comes—”

No, Dakotah thought, you don’t know how I feel, you don’t know what it is like to be me, but she said nothing. She found a waitressing job at Big Bob’s travel stop. The pay was minimum wage, and the tips rarely more than dimes or quarters, but it was enough to rent a three-room apartment over the Elks lodge with Sash.

Otto and Virginia Hicks and Verl and Bonita came with them to the town clerk’s office on her day off. After the brief ceremony, aware that some kind of celebration was proper, they went to Big Bob’s and sat in a booth, surrounded by truckers and gas-field workers. Mr. Castle, the manager, gave them free drinks and his best wishes. Sash ate three Big Bobbers with a quart-size milkshake. Dakotah ordered hot chocolate with whipped cream. Mrs. Hicks spilled cola on her lilac skirt and became impatient to get home and sponge it off. “I hope it don’t stain,” she mourned.

The Hickses were famous for their card parties, at which canasta was the game of choice, and the first prize was one of Virginia Hicks’s pecan pies, for she came from Texas and prided herself on them.

Bonita and Verl also hurried away, as Verl felt his old pain encroaching, moving stealthily toward his heart. None of them knew what it was like having a serious medical condition, Verl thought, nor what it was like waking in the morning and never knowing if he would see the yard light come on at twilight. He had given up on the clinic doctors and now followed the local practice of consulting a chiropractor. The chiropractor, a fat man with steel-rod fingers, told him that his problem was in his spine, and that most ailments, including cancer, were caused by bad, jammed-up spines. Verl’s spine, he said, was one of the worst he had ever seen. Verl slid out of the booth, and Bonita followed, leaving their balled-up greasy napkins on the table instead of putting them in the disposal bin. Dakotah, unable to shake off her job training, picked up after them, threw the cups and paper wrappers in the trash bin, something Sash Hicks (and Mr. Castle) noticed with approval. No one had paid for the food, and Mr. Castle told Dakotah he would deduct the cost from her next paycheck.

Sash Hicks discovered that her quiet demeanor masked a gritty stubbornness. After a few weeks, when they weren’t rolling on the new Super-Puff mattress, they were fighting over issues petty and large.

“Chrissake,” said Hicks, who was still in school, working toward his goal of becoming a computer programmer. “All I asked was for you to get me a beer and some a them chips and the salsa. That goin a break your arm?”

“Get it yourself. I been bossed around since I was a kid. I didn’t agree to be your maid. I worked a full shift and I'm tired. You should be gettin *me* a beer. You act like a customer. Go on, talk to the manager and get me fired!" She surprised herself. Where had this hard attitude come from? It must be from her rebellious, unknown mother. And maybe also from Bonita, who had her own raspy side when Verl wasn't around.

Hicks, aggrieved, saw that he had made a dreadful mistake. Plus, she was flat-chested. After months of her obstinate refusals to bring him tools or beers or to pull off his stinking sneakers, they had it out. He said he was through, and she said good, but she was keeping the apartment, since she paid the rent. In a flare of accusations and blames, they agreed to divorce. He moved back to his parents' house and indulged in a debauch of drinking and partying to celebrate his new freedom. When he failed his final exams, he joined the Army, telling his father that the Army would train him in computer programming and he'd get paid for it, too. It was even better than his original plan—it really would let him be all he could be. He used the investment bonus for a down payment on a new truck, which his family would keep for him until he came back.

DEARBORN SUITE

1.
Middle-aged, supremely bored
with his wife, hating his work,
unable to sleep, he rises
from bed to pace his mansion
in slippers and robe, wondering
if this is all there ever
will be to becoming Henry Ford,
the man who created

the modern world. The skies
above the great Rouge factory
are black with coke smoke, starless,
the world is starless now, all
because he remade it in
his image, no small reward.

2.
Monday comes, as it must, with a pale
moon sinking below the elms.
They told us another dawn was
on the way, possibly held up
by traffic on Grand Boulevard
or by Henry, master of Dearborn,
who loathes sharing the light
with the unenlightened among us.

That was 60 years ago.
The day arrived, a weak sun
but none the less an actual
one, its sooty light bathing
walls, windows, eyelids while
old pal moon drifted off to sleep.

But before he left for basic training Dakotah discovered she was pregnant.

"Oh, my God," Bonita said. "You get hold a Sash Hicks right now."

"What for? We are gettin a divorce. I'm Dakotah Lister now. He's goin in the Army. Me and Sash are through."

"Not if you are havin his baby. You're not through by a long shot. You better call him up right now and stop this divorce mess."

Dakotah would not call him. Why, she wanted to ask Bonita, didn't you and Verl stop me from marrying him in the first place? But she knew that if they had protested she would have run off with Sash to spite them.

The months went by. Dakotah kept working at Big Bob's, enjoying the apartment, having all that room to herself. Sometimes she talked to the absent Sash Hicks: "Get me a glass a champagne, Sash. And a turkey sandwich. With mayo and pickles. Run down the store and pick up some chocolate puddin. What's the matter, cat got your tongue?" She planned to keep the apartment after the baby came. She had not considered who would take care of the baby while she worked.

One day Mrs. Lenski, the school counsellor, came into Big Bob's and sat in a booth by herself. She pulled a tissue from her purse and blew her nose, sopped at her watery eyes.

"Why, Dakotah. I wondered where you were these days. I see you and Sash are expecting. Excuse me, I think I'm getting the flu."

"I'm expecting. He don't even know. We broke up. You were right. It would of been better if I graduated. Get a better job than *this*." She gestured at the booths, at the cubbyhole where the orders from the kitchen came out—Adam and Eve on a raft, axle grease, Mike and Ike, and Big Bob's superburger, called a "bomb" in the kitchen.

"It could be worse," Mrs. Lenski said. "You could have been a school counsellor. Heartbreaker job." She gave Dakotah her card and said they should stay in touch. She came in once a week after that and always asked what Dakotah was doing, planning, thinking of for the future—those questions that adults believed occupied the thoughts of the young.

Mr. Castle asked her to come into his office, a windowless hole that barely contained his desk. A huge tinted photograph of his wife and triplet daughters

3.
As a boy I'd known these fields
rife with wild phlox in April,
where at night the red-tailed fox
came to prey and the horned owl
split the air in a sudden rush
for its kill. I loved that world
with its little woods that held
their darkness and the still ponds,

clear as ice, that held the stars
each night until the dawn broke
into fenced plots of land,
claimed and named, barns and stables,
white houses with eyes shut tight
against the intrusion of sight.

4.
Hell is here in the forge room
where the giant presses stamp
out body parts and the smell
of burning skin seeps into
our hair and under our nails.
The old man, King Henry, punches in
for the night shift with us,
his beloved coloreds and Yids,

to work until the shattered
windows gray. There is a justice
after all, there's a bright anthem
for the occasion, something
familiar and blue, with words we
all sing, like "Time on My Hands."

—*Philip Levine*

took up most of the desk top. Boxes of paper cups were piled in the corner. Mr. Castle had a red, jolly face and a store of mossy jokes.

"Well, Dakotah," he began. "I don't have no problem with you havin a baby, but the company got a policy that no lady more than six months gone can work here."

"That's not fair," said Dakotah. "I need this job. Sash and me split up. I'm on my own. I work hard for you, Mr. Castle."

"Oh, I know that, Dakotah, but it's not for me to say." He cast a husband's practiced eye over her. "That baby is expected pretty damn soon, right? Like in a few weeks? You can't fool me, Dakotah, so don't try." All the jolliness had dried up. She understood that she was being fired.

The boy was born six days later, and Mr. Castle winced as he realized how close they had come to having a delivery during noon rush hour. He sent a potted chrysanthemum with a card saying, "From the Gang at Big Bob's!"

Dakotah had somehow expected the baby to be a quiet creature that she would care for as one cared for a pet. She was unprepared for the child's roaring greediness, his assertion of self, and for the violence of love that swamped her, that made her shake with what she knew must come next.

"I guess I got a put the baby up for adoption," she said to Bonita, then broke down and bawled. "I had money saved up for the doctor, but now I don't have my job and can't pay the rent." Bonita was aghast. The boy was legitimate, though deserted by his father. She could almost hear the Matches sneering that Bonita and Verl would not care for their own flesh and blood.

"You can't bring more shame on this family. It's almost as bad as what your mother done. You come up with some support money from that no-good bum you married, and your granddad and me will take care a the child. We'll have to do it. Your mother's sin unto the second generation. I want you to call up Mrs. Hicks and tell her that her precious son skipped out on his child. Tell her that you are goin to the child-support people and a lawyer. I'll bet you anything he give the enlistment bonus to his folks."

"I spose you want a squeeze money out a him," Mrs. Hicks said to Dakotah. "He is in the Army, and we don't know where. Someplace in California. He didn't tell us where they was sendin him. Probably Eye-rack by now. He said he was bein deployed to Eye-rack. But we don't know for sure. He didn't tell *me*." There was bitterness in her voice, perhaps the bitterness of the neglected mother, or of someone wishing to be in the land of fresh pecans.

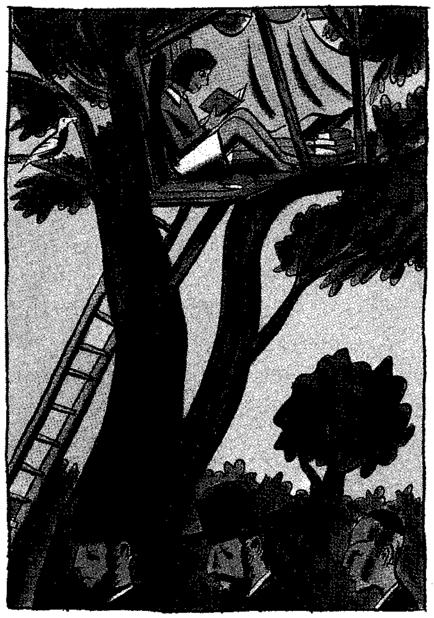
Bonita sighed. "She's lyin. She knows where he is. But them Hickses stick together tighter than cockleburrs. We'll have to take care a him. You name that baby Verl, after your granddad. That'll make him more interested to help the boy."

Among the privileges of Western malehood from which the baby benefitted were opened dams of affection in Bonita and Verl. Dakotah was amazed at the way Verl hung over the infant's crib mouthing nonsense words, but she understood what had happened. It was the same knife slice of love that had cut her. He wanted Dakotah to change the child's last name to Lister, but she said that although Sash Hicks was a rat he was still the legal and legitimate father and the baby would stay a Hicks.

Nor could Sash Hicks be located. He had been at Fort Irwin National Training Center and had sent home a cryptic letter: "I learned some Arab words.

FAITH AND DOUBT

COUNTING PAGES



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

As a young girl, I spent more time outside synagogues than in them. Services were long, and I always found some excuse to get away. I remember the Quonset hut where my family went to services when we first moved to Honolulu. The building looked like a white cylinder half buried in the ground. I remember borrowed space in a Unitarian church, an elegant old house with woven mats covering hardwood floors. A weathered tree house sat in the branches of a large tree in the garden. I'd leave my sandals on the grass and climb the ladder to read Wizard of Oz books.

My parents did expect me to participate at least some of the time. During the High Holidays, I amused myself by hanging upside down on my chair. I'd pretend I was a bat and stare at the appropriately named Mrs. Batkin's feet. Then my mother would whisper, "Doesn't this day mean anything to you?"

I was a daydreamer and a page counter. On Yom Kippur, I kept my finger on the last page of the evening service. Only seventy pages to go. Fifty! Maybe now I could get up and make a trip to the water fountain. I was expert at every diversion. For some years, our traditional minyan prayed on Saturday mornings at Honolulu's Temple Emanu-El. The Temple had a library with a slot in the door for returning books. I'd thread my long, thin arm through the opening and unlock the door from the inside. Once in, I'd sit at the dark conference table and read. Mr. Fischel, the volunteer librarian, had ordered a set of children's biographies—beautifully written lives of Jewish luminaries, including Sholem Aleichem, Rebecca Gratz, Henrietta Szold, Emma Lazarus, Albert Einstein, and Lillian Wald.

Was I becoming a little Unitarian myself? A secular humanist? I heard singing in the distance—"*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, Adonai tseva'ot, melo khol ha'arets kevodo.* Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of Hosts; His presence fills all the earth"—as I was curled up in a library chair discovering when Lillian Wald had founded the visiting-nurses' movement. Sometimes on Rosh Hashanah I'd come down with terrible allergy attacks. Apparently, I was allergic to mold spores in the Temple's air-conditioning system. More than once, my mother whisked me home, and I would spend the rest of the day convalescing on the couch with "The Complete Sherlock Holmes," instead of praying to be inscribed in the book of life.

In the summers, we vacationed in Tannersville, New York, where my mother's family still had a house. The summer people in Tannersville were devout Jews. An undulating sea of black suits filled the men's section of the synagogue. Behind lace curtains in the women's section, the married ladies covered their hair with hats or wigs. I played outside in the sun and through the open windows watched the men bobbing and swaying.

I did believe in God. I always had, ever since I could remember. In my own brief experience, I had known the crashing waves of the Pacific and the long summer evenings of the Catskills. The world, so complex and beautiful, must have a creator. The sky, the stars, and all the trees must come from something. They could not generate themselves. But my belief in God did not translate into action. At school, my younger sister refused to sing Christmas carols because she was Jewish. She was six. I, on the other hand, looked forward to the Christmas pageant every year. I was always a villager, because after some discussion my parents had concluded that the villagers in the Christmas story were Jews. They drew the line at angels, which they deemed problematic theologically, and so I never wore a tinsel halo or white wings.

I enjoyed singing carols. I sat through Shabbat services making up my own stories about Laura Ingalls Wilder to add to the adventures in her books. And yet, inexorably, some of my own religion rubbed off on me. Might that be the way belief works for some people? Not a sudden epiphany but a long, slow accumulation of Sabbaths. No road-to-Damascus conversion but a kind of coin rubbing, in which ritual and repetition begin to reveal the credo underneath. As I grew older, I was drawn to poetry, and I began to study the haftarah—the weekly selection from the prophets. As I grew busier, I began to appreciate time away from the world. Services became a refuge. I did not need to rest when I was a child, because I did not work. I did not want to come inside, because the outside world was still entirely beautiful to me.

—*Allegra Goodman*

Na'am. Marhaba. Marhaba means hello. *Na'am* means yes. So you know."

Neither Bonita nor Verl would hear of Dakotah's going on welfare or accepting social services, for the Matches would rightly condemn them as weak-kneed sucks on the taxpayer's tit. They talked it through at night, the yard light casting its corrosive light on the south wall. She could go back to Mr. Castle and beg for her old job. Bonita and Verl would care for the baby. Or—

"Way we see it," Bonita said to Dakotah, "is you ought a join the Army yourself. They take women. You can support Little Verl that way. Finish your education. And find out how to get through the red tape that will track down Sash Hicks. Me and Big Verl will take care a him until you get through with the Army. A job at Big Bob's don't pay enough."

Verl added his opinion. "When you come back, you can get a real good job. And if you can get one a them digital cameras cheap at the PX we'll take pictures a him—" He nodded at the baby sleeping in his carry chair.

She could not believe how solicitous they had become. It was as though their icy hearts had melted and the leg whippings had never happened, as though they were bound by affection instead of grudging duty. She marvelled that this change of heart was rooted in involuntary love, a love that had not moved them when they brought her as an infant to the ranch.

Her grandfather drove her to the recruitment office in Crack Springs, harping all the way on duty, responsibility, the necessity of signing the papers so child support could come to them. He also drove her to the Military Entrance Processing Station in Cody. He had even picked out a specialty for her: combat medic.

"I checked around," he said, winking his pinpoint aquamarine eyes, which, as he aged, had almost disappeared under colorless eyebrows and hanging folds of flesh. "E.M.T.s make good money. You could get to be a medic, and when you come back, why, there's your career, just waiting." The word "career" sounded strange coming out of his mouth. For years, he had ranted against women who worked out of the home. On the ranches, wives held everything together—cooking for big crowds, nursing the sick and injured, cleaning, raising children and driving them to rodeo practice, paying the bills, making mail runs and picking up feed at the farm supply, taking the dogs in for their shots, riding with the men at branding and shipping time, and, in mountain country, helping with the annual shove up and shove down to and from Forest Service leases—but were treated with little more regard than the beef they helped produce.

It was almost spring, last night's small snow spiking up the dead grass in ragged points, balling in the yellow joints of the streamside willow, snow that would melt as soon as the sun touched it. She was joining the Army, leaving behind the seedy two-story town, the dun-colored prairie flattened by wind, leaving the gumbo roads, the radio voices flailing through nets of static, the gossip and the narrow opinions. As they drove through the town, she saw the muddy truck that was always parked in front of the bar, the kid named Bub Carl, who hung around the barbershop. The sun was up, warming the asphalt, and already heat waves ran across the road as the old landscape fell away behind her. Yet she felt nothing for the place or for herself, not even relief at escaping Verl and Bonita, nor sorrow nor regret at putting the baby in their care. As for the child, she would be coming back to him. He would wait, as she had waited, but for him there would be a happy ending, for she would return. She picked him up and stared into his slate-blue eyes.

"See? I'm comin back to get you. I'm comin back for you. I love you and will come back. Promise."

She went to Fort Leonard Wood, in Missouri, for basic training. The first thing she learned was that it was still a man's army and that women were decidedly inferior in all ways. The memory flashed of a time when she had gone shopping with Bonita in Cody. Bonita favored a pint-size mall that featured Cowboy Meats, Radio Shack, and a video store. Dakotah chose to wait in the truck instead of trailing after Bonita, who was a ruthless and vociferous shopper for the cheapest of everything. Dakotah watched a man and his two children outside Grum's Dollar Mart, where there was a tiny patch of grass. The man had a hard red face and a brown mustache. He was throwing a Frisbee gently to the boy, a slow toddler unable to catch it. Against the wall of the Dollar Mart stood the girl, a year or two older than the boy, but the father did not throw the Frisbee to her. Dakotah smiled at the girl staring so fixedly at the father and son. Finally, Dakotah got out of the truck and walked over.

"Hey there," she said to the girl. "What's your name?"

The child did not answer but flattened herself against the grimy wall.

"What d'*you* want?" the father said, letting his arm down, the Frisbee sagging against his leg.

"Nothin. Just sayin hello. To the little girl."

"Yeah. Well, here comes your granny. Git home and don't be botherin my kids." The little girl gave her a look of pure hatred and stuck out a long yellow tongue.

"What're you doin talkin a him?" Bonita said.

"I wasn't! I was sayin hello to the little girl. Who are they?"

"He's Rick Sminger, one a Shaina's old . . . friends. Least said about him the better. I was you, I wouldn't ask no questions. Get in and let's get goin."

The worst thing about the Army, the thing she knew she could never get used to, was the constant presence of too many people, too close, in her face, radiating heat and smells, talking and shouting. Someone who has grown up in silence amid vast space, who was born to solitude, suffers in the company of others. So homesickness took the shape of pining for wind, an empty landscape, for silence and privacy. She longed for the baby and came to believe she was homesick for the old ranch.

She made a low score on the aptitude test, edging into the borderline just enough to continue on. She thought about Verl's suggestion that she become a combat medic. She had no other ideas. At least she would be helping people. She named it as her choice of a military occupational specialty. During basic training, she heard that becoming a combat medic was very tough. But she had learned C.P.R. in sophomore gym class and thought she could study enough to pass a few tests.

After basic training, she went to Fort

Sam Houston, in San Antonio, for E.M.T. training. All of her fellow-volunteers seemed to have been practicing medicine since kindergarten. Pat Moody, a wiry blonde from Oregon, was the daughter of a doctor and had heard medical talk for years. Marnie Jellson came from a potato farm in Idaho and had cared for her sick mother for two years. When the mother died, she had enlisted. Tommet Means had been an E.M.T. since high school. Chris Jinkla came from a family of veterinarians and had accompanied his father on calls a thousand times. "I grew up bandaging paws," he said.

She and Pat and Marnie became friends. Pat played the guitar and taught Dakotah enough chords to string together "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore." Marnie had a collection of movies that they watched on weekends. She had a potato tattooed on her left calf and knew dozens of potato jokes. Both of them talked about their families, and finally Dakotah explained that her grandparents had bought her up, told about Sash and the breakup and the baby.

"You poor kiddo," Marnie said. "You've been through a lot."

"How can it be," she asked them, "that you feel homesick for a place you hate?" She thought of the neutral smell of dust, like stones or old wood, of summer haze from distant forest fires, of rose-rock outcrops breaking from the rusty earth. She thought of the run-down town, every other building sporting a weathered "For Sale" sign.

"Maybe it's the people you are homesick for, not the place," Pat said.

And, of course, it was. She saw that right away. Not just Baby Verl but even closed-up Bonita and Verl hitching along on his bad legs.

She bought a camera and sent it to Bonita and Verl, begging them to take photographs of the baby. She taped dozens of them on her wall. She wrote long letters to Baby Verl, covered the margins with symbols of kisses and hugs. She and Pat and Marnie raided the PX for baby toys, miniature bluejeans, pajamas imprinted with tanks and planes.

They went to dinner at restaurants, and Dakotah learned that it was bad manners to stack the empty dishes. "I was just helpin the waitress out," she explained.

At a Japanese place, one night, Pat persuaded her to try sushi.

"What is it?" she asked, looking at the hump of rice with an orange slice of something on top.

"It is salmon and rice, and that is wasabi, a kind of grated horseradish. It's hot."

She ate it, and the texture of the salmon startled her. "It's not cooked!"

"It's not supposed to be cooked."

"It's raw—raw fish! I ate it!" Her stomach heaved, but she kept it down and even ate another. A day later, she remembered Bonita describing Shaina putting raw trout on some Minute rice. Was it possible that her mother had heard somewhere about sushi and decided to try it—Wyoming style? Was it possible that her mother had been exhibiting not craziness but curiosity about the outside world? She told Pat and Marnie about it, and they decided that was it: curiosity and a longing for the exotic.

As the tsunami of reading material, lectures, slides, videos, X-rays, computer tutorials on anatomy, diseases, trauma, physiology, obstetrics, pediatrics, shock, and a bewildering vocabulary of medical terms swept over the group, Dakotah did not think she would pass the E.M.T. Basic Registry Exam. And, even if she did, then came primary-care training and the horror courses in chemical, explosive, and radiation injuries.

"I will never get to Whiskey level," she said calmly to Pat, thinking of needle chest decompression and clearing airways, both of which she dreaded.

"Come on, you'll make it," Pat, who aced every test, said. Dakotah passed the E.M.T. test, but at the bottom of the class. Marnie flat out failed.

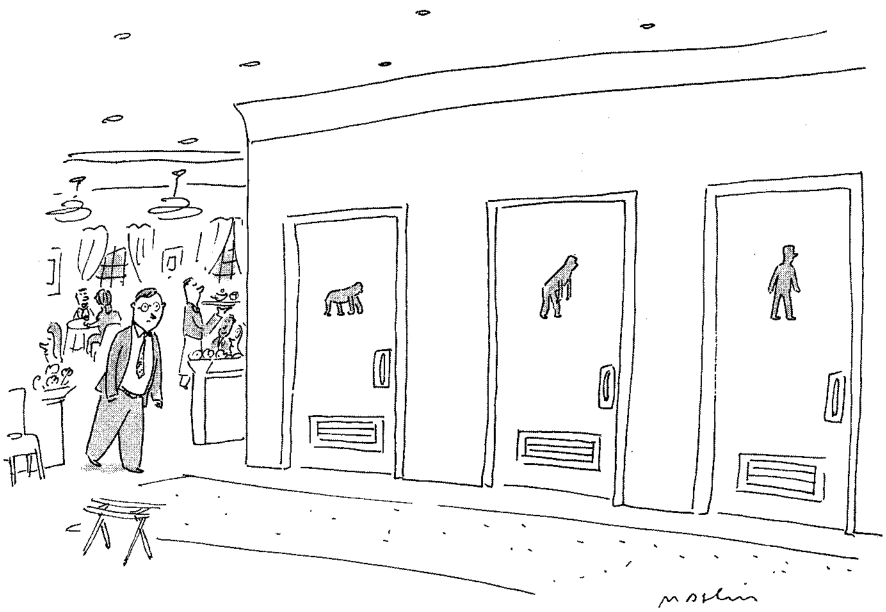
"Suggest you think about changin to military police," the squinty-eyed, spotted-banana-skin instructor said to Dakotah. "Medicine is not your thing. I know I'd sure hate to be lyin there with my guts hangin out and here comes old rough-hand Dakotah tryin to remember what to do."

Pat went to Fort Drum, in New York, for training at the medical-simulation center, where darkness, explosions, and smoke mimicked realistic battlefield situations. She sent Marnie and Dakotah a letter describing Private Hunk, a computerized patient-simulation mannequin who could bleed, breathe, and even talk a little. He was complete in every detail, constructed for countless intubations, tracheotomies, catheterizations. He suffered sucking chest wounds, hideous traumas. He bled and moaned for help, and on occasion shrieked an inhuman bird call, like a falcon. He was hot or cold, at the instructor's wish, could run a fever or suffer severe hypothermia.

"He's got a cute little dick," Pat wrote. "I'm in love with him." Dakotah answered the letter, but they never heard from Pat again.

There were many letters from Bonita, the words looping downhill across the page and ending with a two-line prayer. She always began with news of Baby Verl's progress—cutting teeth, crawling, standing up, how Verl's old dog Bum had taken to him, following him everywhere and letting Baby Verl pull his ears, how Verl had got another dog, Buddy, because Bum was getting old, and how Buddy loved the baby even more than Bum did; and only when she had detailed every wonderful thing Baby Verl had done did she report on other things. Big Verl, she said, had quit his chiropractor and was now going to a fat woman who gave massages and charged terrific prices: "At least she advertises they are massages. If Verl wasn't Verl, I would think it was something else." Dakotah felt a rare and even painful rush of affection mixed with pity for Bonita, although she suspected she was only writing out of a sense of duty.

A few letters came from Mrs. Lenski, alternately sardonic and cheerful. It seemed to Dakotah that, as soon as she had left, the town started dying off. One of the Vasey twins had been killed and the other severely injured in a car crash at the intersection, where everybody knew to slow down. Some truck with Colorado plates had blasted through and T-boned them. And, Mrs. Lenski wrote, two lesbian women with a herd of goats had bought the Tin Can house and planned to make cheese and sell it locally. Dakotah was shocked to see the word "lesbian" on the page of a letter like any ordinary word. Tug Diceheart and two other hands riding for the Tic-Tac had been caught making meth in the bunkhouse and had been arrested. Juiciest of all, Carol Match had left Wyatt and returned to California to become a real-estate agent. Dakotah wondered if Verl was gloating.



In Iraq, both Dakotah and Marnie changed their M.O.S. to military police. They had become close, closer than she had ever been to Sash. Dakotah, for the first time in her life, had someone to talk to, someone who understood everything, from rural ways to failing at tests. Marnie said they were in love. They talked about setting up house together with Baby Verl after they got out. One day they were in a Humvee, Dakotah clutching a machine gun, on their way to a checkpoint to search Iraqi women.

"Yup, here we are with the fuckups. M.P. is where the dumb ones end up. Supposed a be the stupidest part of the entire Army."

"Don't you think some of the officers could get that prize?"

"Yeah. So probably M.P.s come second. Second-dumbest, something to brag about."

They had learned that the checkpoints were intensely dangerous, and after a few weeks Dakotah developed a little magic ritual to keep herself alive. She rapidly twitched the muscles of her toes, heel, calf, knee, hip, waist, shoulder, eyebrows, elbow, wrist, thumb, fingers on the right side, and then repeated the series for the left side. Bonita had sent her a silver-plated cross that she recognized. It had always been in the second drawer of the kitchen dresser with a tortoiseshell comb, a pot holder too nice to use, a pair of small kid gloves that had belonged to Verl's famous great-grandmother, a red box with a sliding lid filled with old buttons. She wore the cross once, but it got tangled with her dog tags and she put it away.

She hated searching the Iraqi women, knew that they hated her doing it. Some of them smelled, and their voluminous, often ragged and dusty burkas could conceal anything from a black-market radio to baby clothes or a bomb. One young woman had six glossy eggplants hidden under her garment. Dakotah pitied her, unable even to buy and carry home a few eggplants without an American soldier groping at her.

On the day the I.E.D. exploded under the Humvee, she had not completed the left side of the protecting muscle twitches, choosing a third cup of coffee instead. It happened too suddenly for anything to register. One moment they were travelling fast, the next she was looking up into the face of Chris Jinkla.

"Moooo," she said, trying to make a cow joke for the veterinarian's son, but he didn't recognize her and thought she was moaning. She felt nothing at that moment and tried her magic muscle-twitch sequence, but something was wrong on the right side.

"I'm fine, Chris. Except my arm."

The medic was startled. He peered into her bloody face. "My God, it's Pat, right?"

"Dakotah," she whispered. "I'm Dakotah. I'm fine, but I need my arm. Please look for it. I can't go home without it." She turned her head and saw a heap of bloody rags and a patch of skin.

"Marnie?"

Her right arm was still there, though cruelly shattered, and the best they could hope for, said the doctor at the field hospital, was to amputate and save enough stump to allow for a prosthetic. "You're young and strong," he said. "You'll make it."

"I'm fine," she agreed. "How about Marnie?" She knew as she asked.

She was shipped out to Germany with other wounded soldiers, gradually aware that there was some awful knowledge hovering, something worse than her mangled arm, which had been amputated, something as bad as losing Marnie. Maybe they had discovered that she had cancer and wouldn't tell her. But it was not until she was sent to Walter Reed that she heard the bad news from Bonita, who stood at her bedside with a curious expression of sorrow and, looking at the stump of her arm, ghoulish curiosity.

"Oh, oh," Bonita whispered, and then burst into streaming tears. Never had Dakotah seen anyone cry that way, tears pouring down Bonita's cheeks to the corners of her mouth, splashing from her jawline onto her rayon blouse as though her head were filled with water. She could not speak for long minutes.

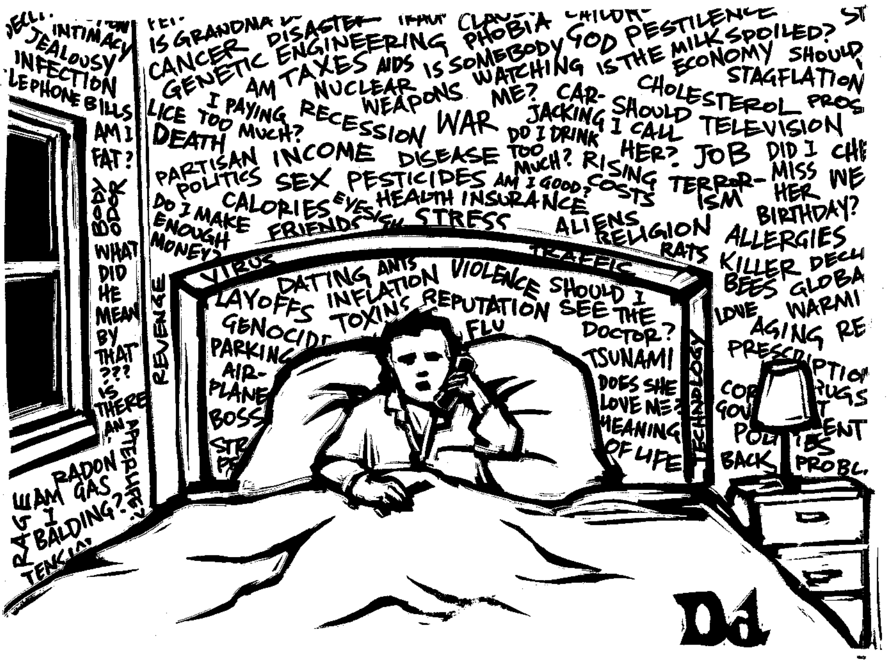
"Baby Verl," she finally said.

"What?" Dakotah knew instinctively that it was the worst thing.

"Ridin in the back a Big Verl's truck—" And the tears began again.

The story came slowly. The eighteen-month-old child had loved riding with his great-grandfather, but this day Verl had put him with the dogs in the open truck bed. Big Verl was so proud to have a boy and wanted him to be tough. The dogs loved him. Bonita said that several times. The rest of it came in a rush.

"See, Verl thought he'd just sit with the dogs. They done it before. But you know how dogs hang over the edge. Baby Verl did that, too, near as we can tell, so that when the truck went down in one a them dips it threw him out. It was a acci-


INTIMACY
JEALOUSY
INFECTION
LEPHONE BILLS
AM I FAT?
BODY ODOR
WHAT DID HE MEAN BY THAT???
IS THERE AN AFTERLIFE?
RADON GAS
AM I BALDING?
RAGE
TENSION
IS GRANDMA
CANCER
DISASTER
GENETIC ENGINEERING
CLAUSTROPHOBIA
GOD
PESTILENCE
AM I PAYING TOO MUCH?
TAXES
AIDS
IS SOMEBODY WATCHING ME?
IS THE MILK SPOILED?
ECONOMY
STAGFLATION
NUCLEAR WEAPONS
RECESSION
WAR
CARJACKING
CHOLESTEROL
SHOULD I CALL HER?
TELEVISION
DEATH
PARTISAN POLITICS
INCOME
DISEASE
DO I DRINK TOO MUCH?
RISING COSTS
JOB
DID I MISS HER BIRTHDAY?
SEX
PESTICIDES
AM I GOOD?
TERRORISM
CALORIES
EYESIGHT
HEALTH INSURANCE
DO I MAKE ENOUGH MONEY?
FRIENDS
STRESS
ALIENS
RELIGION
ALLERGIES
RATS
KILLER BEES
TRAFFIC
VIRUS
DATING
ANTS
VIOLENCE
LAYOFFS
INFLATION
TOXINS
REPUTATION
SHOULD I SEE THE DOCTOR?
GENOCIDE
FLU
PARKING
AIRPLANE
BOSS
TSUNAMI
DOES SHE LOVE ME?
MEANING OF LIFE
REVENGE
TECHNOLOGY
LOVE
GLOBAL WARMING
AGING
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS
BACK
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"When I can't sleep, I find that it sometimes helps to get up and jot down my anxieties."

• •

dent. He fell under the wheels, Dakotah. Big Verl is half crazy. They got him sedated. The doctors are fixin it up for you to come home."

Dakotah threw back her head and howled. She began to curse Bonita and Verl. How could he be so stupid as to put a baby in the bed of a pickup? The shouting and crying brought an irritated nurse, who asked them to keep it down. Bonita, who had been backing away, ran into the corridor and did not return.

"It takes a year, Dakotah," said Mrs. Parka, the grief counsellor, a full-bosomed woman with enormous liquid eyes. "A full turn of the seasons before you begin to heal. Time does heal all wounds, and right now the passage of time is the best medicine. And you yourself must heal physically as well as spiritually. You need to be very strong. What is your religion?"

Dakotah shook her head. She had asked the woman to write to Mrs. Lenski and tell her what had happened, but the woman said it was part of the healing process for Dakotah to face the fact of Baby Verl's passing and tell Mrs. Lenski herself. She wanted to choke the woman until she went blue-black and died.

"There are other ways for you to communicate. The telephone. E-mail?"

"Get away from me," Dakotah said.

At the end of the summer, she was still there, in a grimy old motel somehow connected to the hospital, getting used to the prosthesis. She sat in the dim room doing nothing. She struggled to understand the morass of papers about disability allowances, death allowances, Baby Verl's support. One of the official letters said that support payments for Baby Verl Hicks should never have been paid to, by, or through Dakotah but through the child's father, S/Sergeant Saskatoon M. Hicks, currently at Walter Reed hospital recuperating.

That Sash was somewhere at the hospital amazed her. That she had learned about it amazed her more, for the confusion and chaos of lost patients was like the nest of rattlesnakes Verl had once shown her, a coiling mass under a shelving boulder. He had fired his old 12-gauge at them, and still the torn flesh twisted.

One afternoon a volunteer came to her. Dakotah saw that she must be rich; she was trim and tanned and wore an elegant raspberry-colored wool suit with a white silk shirt.

"Are you Dakotah Hicks?"

She had forgotten they were still married. Sash's divorce action had gone dormant when he left for basic training.

"Yes, but we were gettin a divorce. And then I don't know what happened."

"Well, your husband is here in the complex, and his doctors think you ought to see him. I should warn you, he has suffered very severe injuries. He may not recognize you. He probably won't. They are hoping that seeing you again will . . . sort of wake him up."

Dakotah said nothing at first. She did not want to see Sash. She wanted to see Marnie. She wanted Baby Verl. She half believed he was waiting at home, ready to play patty-cake. She could feel his small warm hands.

"I don't really want to see him. We got nothin to talk about."

But the woman sat beside her chair and cajoled. Dakotah breathed in a delicious fragrance, as rich as apricots in cream and with the slight bitterness of the cyanide kernel at its core. The woman's hands were shapely, with long pale nails. Because it seemed that the only way to get rid of the woman was to agree, in the end she went.

Sash Hicks had disintegrated, both legs blown off at mid-thigh, the left side of his face a mass of shiny scar tissue, the left ear and eye gone. It was almost like seeing Marnie, whom she knew was dead, although she kept hearing her voice in corridors. Sash's nurse told her that he had suffered brain damage. But Dakotah recognized him, old Billy the Kid shot up by Pat Garrett. More than ever, he looked like the antique outlaw. He stared at the ceiling with his right eye. The destroyed face showed no comprehension of anything except that something was terribly wrong.

"Sash. It's me, Dakotah."

He said nothing. Although his face was ruined and he was ravaged from the waist down, his right shoulder and arm were muscular and stout.

She didn't know what she felt for him—pity, or nothing at all.

Words came out of the distorted mouth.

"Ah, ah, eh." He subsided as though someone had unscrewed the valve that kept his body inflated and upright. His moment of grappling with the world had passed, and his chin sank onto his chest.

"Are you asleep?" Dakotah asked. There was no answer, and she left.

The trip to the ranch was hard, but there was nowhere else to go. She dreaded seeing Verl. Would she scream and punch him? Grab the .30-30 on top of the dish cupboard and shoot him? Sonny Ezell's old taxi moved very slowly. Her prosthesis was in her suitcase. She knew they would have to see the arm stump to believe what had happened, just as she would have to see Baby Verl's grave.

They passed the Match ranch, unchanged, and turned onto Sixteen Mile. The days were shortening, but there was still plenty of light, the top of Table Butte, layered bands of buff, gamboge, and violet, gilded by the setting sun. The shallow river, as yellow as lemon rind, lay flaccid between denuded banks. The dying sun hit the willows, transforming them into fiery wands. Light reflected off the road as from glass. They seemed to be travelling through a hammered red landscape in which ranch buildings appeared dark and sorrowful. She knew what blood-soaked ground was, knew that severed arteries squirted like the back-yard hose. A dog came out of the ditch and ran into a stubble field. They passed the Persa ranch, where the youngest son had drowned in last spring's flood. She realized that every ranch she passed had lost a boy, lost boys early and late, boys smiling, sure in their risks, healthy, tipped out of the current of life by liquor and acceleration, rodeo smashups, bad horses, deep irrigation ditches, high trestles, tractor rollovers, and unsecured truck doors. Her boy, too. This was the waiting darkness that surrounded ranch boys, the dangerous growing up that cancelled out their favored status. The trip along this road was a roll call of grief. Wind began to lift the fine dust, and the sun set in haze.

When she got out at the house, the wind swallowed her whole, snatching at her scarf, huffing up under the hem of her coat, eeling up her sleeve. She could feel the grit. Every step she took, dried weeds snapped under her shoes. Sonny Ezell carried her suitcase to the porch and wouldn't take any money. Someone inside switched on the porch light.

She did not attack Verl. Both of her grandparents hugged her and cried. Verl fell to his knees and sobbed that he was sorry unto death. He pressed his wet face against her hand. He had never before touched her in any way. She felt nothing and took it to mean recovery. There was a large color photograph of Baby Verl on the wall. He was sitting on a bench with one chubby leg folded under him, the other dangling and showing a snowy white stocking and miniature sneaker. They must have taken him to the Wal-Mart portrait studio. He held a plush bear by its ear.

Bonita brought out a big dinner—fried chicken, mashed potatoes, string beans with cream sauce, fresh rolls, and for dessert a pecan pie that she said Mrs. Hicks had sent over. She said something about Mrs. Hicks that Dakotah did not catch. It was a terrible dinner. None of them could eat. They pushed the food around and in hoarse, teary voices said how good everything looked. Verl, perhaps trying to set an example, took a forkful of mashed potato and retched. At last they got up. Bonita wrapped the food with plastic film and put it in the refrigerator.

"We'll eat it tomorrow," she said.

They sat in awful silence in the living room, the television set dark.

"Your old room is made up," Bonita said. In the quiet, the kitchen refrigerator hummed like wind in the wires. "You know, them Hickses couldn't afford to go to Warshinton and see Sash. They need to know about him. They can't find out a thing. They telephoned a hunderd times. Every time they call that hospital, they get cut off or transferred to somebody don't know. They need for you to tell them. It's bad, them not knowing."

She could not tell them how much worse it was to know.

The next morning, they could all drink coffee. Mourning, grief, and loss were somehow eased by hot, black coffee. But still no one could eat. At noon, Dakotah left Verl and Bonita and went for a walk up the pine slope. A new power line ran through the slashed trees.

At supper, the welcome-home meal reappeared, heated in Bonita's microwave, which she had bought with some of Dakotah's money. They finally ate, very slowly. In a low voice, Dakotah said that the chicken was good, though it had no taste. Bonita made more coffee—none of them would sleep, anyway—and cut Mrs. Hicks's pecan pie. Verl gazed at the golden triangle on his plate, seemed unable to lift his fork.

There was the creak of the kitchen door, and Otto and Virginia Hicks came in, tentatively. Bonita urged them to sit down, got coffee for them. Mrs. Hicks's red eyes went to Dakotah. Her hand shook and the cup stuttered against the saucer.

"What about Sash?" she blurted. "You seen him. We got that official letter that says he is coming home. They don't say how bad he was hurt. We can't find out nothing. He don't call us. Maybe he can't call us. What about Sash?"

Bonita looked at Dakotah, opened her mouth to say something, then closed it again.

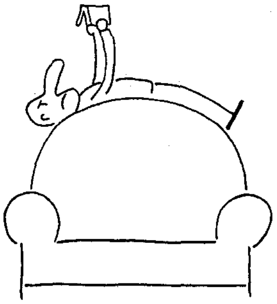
The silence spread out like a rain-swollen river, lapping against the walls of the room, mounting over their heads. Dakotah thought of Sonny Ezell's taxi rolling slowly past the bereft ranches. She felt the Hickses' fear begin to solidify into knowledge. Already, grief was settling around the tense couple like a rope loop, the same rope that encircled all of them. She had to draw the Hickses' rope tight around them until they went numb to the pain, had to show that it didn't pay to love.

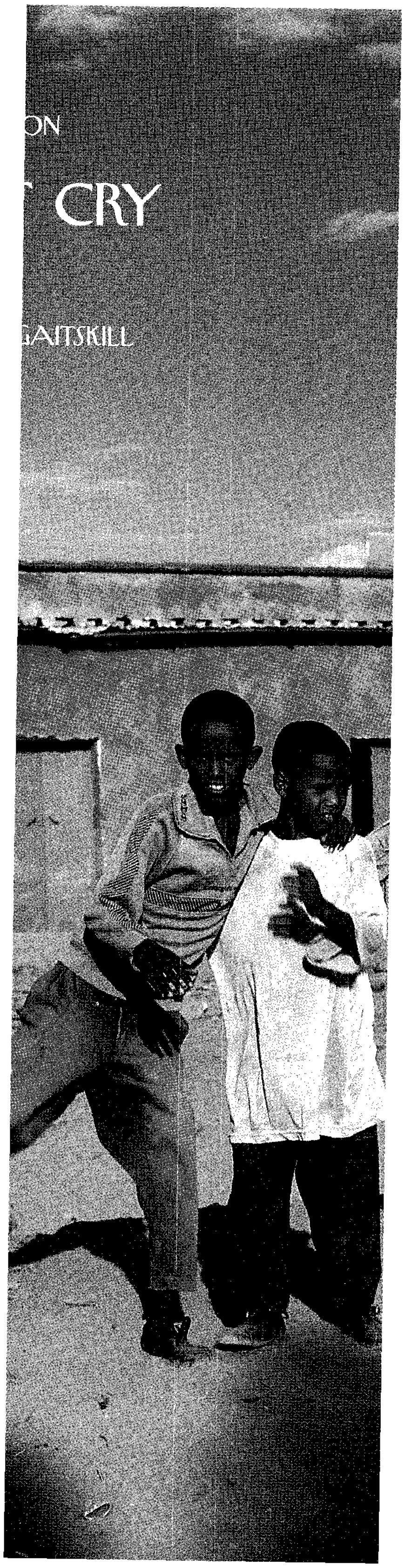
"Sash," she said at last, so softly they could barely hear. "Sash is tits-up in a ditch."

They sat frozen, like survivors in the aftermath of an explosion, each silently calculating his chances. The air vibrated. At last Mrs. Hicks turned her red eyes on Dakotah.

"You're his wife," she said.

And Dakotah felt her hooves slip as she began her descent into the dark, watery mud. ♦

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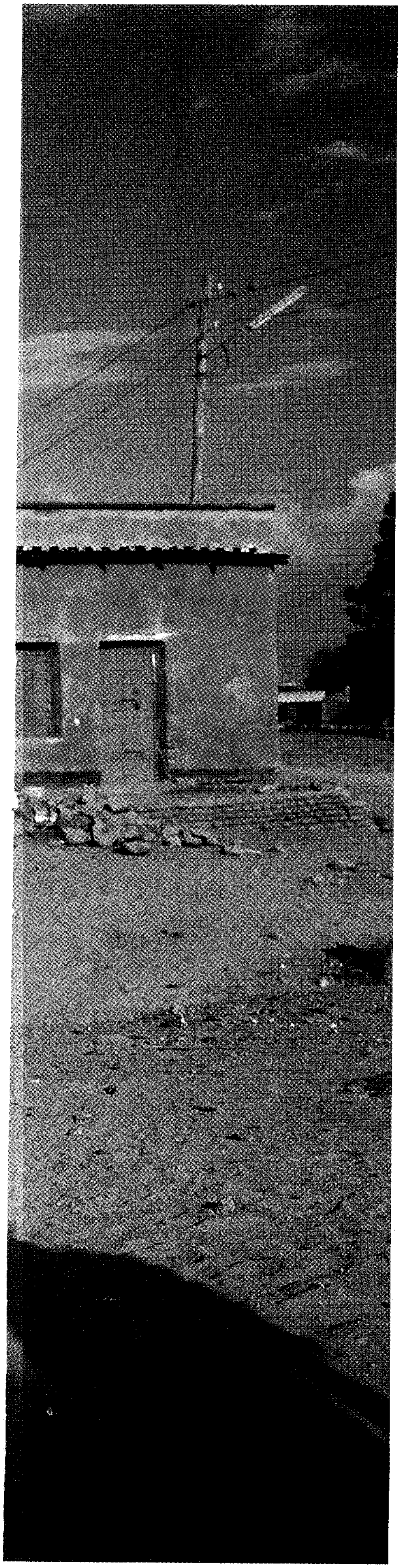


Our first morning in Addis Ababa there was wedding music playing outside the hotel. We had travelled for twenty hours and we were deeply asleep. The music entered my sleep in the form of lights, moving like fireflies or animate laughter, in a pattern, but a loose and playful one. I was dreaming that I was with my husband, Thomas; he had just died, but in the dream he was alive and very young, and we were chasing a light that had come free of the others, running down a winding path with darkness all around.

When I woke, at first I did not know where I was. The music seemed more real than the dingy room; its sound saturated me with happiness and pain. Then I saw Katya and remembered where we were and why. She was already up and standing at the window, lifting a shade to peer out—the sun made a warm place on her skin and I felt affection for her known form in this unknown place. She turned and said, "Janice, there's weddings going on outside—plural!"

We went outside. All around our hotel were gardens, and in the gardens were crowds of people dressed in the bright colors of undiluted joy. Brides and grooms were wearing white satin, and the streets were lined with white flower-covered limousines, and together with so much color the white also seemed colorful. Little girls in red-and-white crinoline ran past us, followed by a laughing woman. Everyone was laughing or smiling, and because I could not tell where the music was coming from, I had the sensation that it was coming directly from these smiling, laughing people. Katya turned to me and said, "Are we in heaven?"

I answered, "I don't know," and for a second I meant it.

In the dirty hotel restaurant we ate dry, bricklike croissants and lots of good fruit—papaya, mangoes, bananas, oranges, and pineapple. The coffee was burnt, so we decided to go to an espresso place that we'd been told was just a few blocks away. We never found it, although we walked a long time. At first, we walked on a crowded paved street, with department stores, an Internet café, and a grocery store with a big Magic Marker drawing (green and red) of fruit and vegetables in the window. Starving dogs wandered freely. The pavement abruptly fell off and the street became rocky. We saw another wedding party, in a Mercedes decked with rich-colored flowers, moving through a herd of donkeys, the herders lagging behind, talking on their cell phones. Beggars swarmed around us, shouting and showing us their deformed limbs, their blind eyes. We forgot our espresso. The rocky street gave way to dirt with pools of muddy water. Houses, patched together with tin, plastic, canvas, and wood, bulged out, sagged in, lurched, and leaned this way and that. Wedding guests in gold pants and silky shirts pushed their broken-down car through slowly parting pedestrians. A little boy marched along blowing a horn; he was followed by an even smaller boy, shouting and rhythmically shaking a clutch of bells on a strap. The smell of fresh shit rose up suddenly and mixed with the odors of sweat and cooked meat. An old woman seated in the roots of a giant tree sold bundled sticks and dresses mounted on smiling white mannequins. Trees made soft, blunt, deep-green shapes with their boughs. Katya turned to me, her face dazed. "We'd better go back," she said. "We're getting lost."

Katya was in Ethiopia to adopt a baby; I was there to help her. Katya had asked me to go with her because I was one of her oldest friends, going back to our waitressing days in Manhattan. She was a narrow little woman with a broad, bossy air: ugly-beautiful, her full lower lip a bit too pendulous, her hips and breasts small but highly charged, her black hair big, curly, and shining with secreted oil. The restaurant we'd worked at was run by Mafia thugs, and they would sometimes come in before our shift to do coke with us. The head thug really liked Katya; he confided in her and asked her advice and she consoled him and bossed him around.

In those days, I was putting myself through a writing program; she was having experiences. I got married and turned into an English professor who publishes stories in quarterly magazines. She started various businesses, which she either failed at or got bored of and sold. She had family money to begin with, and in spite of the failures along the way she actually amassed some money of her own. Eventually, she opened a boutique in D.C., which was where she lived. She had made some Ethiopian friends, one of whom, a woman named Meselu, ran a "big woman's" store across the street from Katya's.

Katya had been thinking of adoption for some time. This was 2005, and she was already forty-nine. She didn't want to go through an agency in America, because it pissed her off that the agencies would give the birth mother full disclosure regarding the adoptive parent but not vice versa. She didn't want to go through a foreign agency, because most of them required a two-year wait, and she felt that she was too old. She had learned through someone on the Internet—a woman in California who'd adopted an Ethiopian child three years earlier—that independent adoptions in Ethiopia were relatively easy. It helped, of course, that Meselu could hook her up with people in Addis Ababa, including a driver named Yonas, who specialized in clients who were there to adopt.

When Katya asked me if I would go to Africa with her, I said yes, because Thomas had died four months earlier and I hadn't yet gone back to teaching. In the emptiness of my life, it didn't seem to matter what I did; between doing nothing and doing something, it seemed better to do something. Thomas and I had never had children, and maybe, without thinking about it, I wanted to help my friend give a child safe passage. Katya had never been lucky with men and I knew that she had always envied me my marriage; perhaps I was hoping to balance my loss with something good for her. In any case, before I left I took Thomas's wedding ring from the altar I had made in our bedroom, took my own ring from my finger, and put them both on a gold chain around my neck.

The day after we arrived was a Saturday, so we weren't able to go to any orphanages; instead, we had dinner with Meselu's relatives. We took with us the huge bundles of clothes, toiletries, and batteries that Meselu had sent. The house was behind a high stone wall, with an archway bowered with thick-growing plants. The family matriarch, Zeyneb, served us a spread with a dozen little meat dishes—goat and lamb in a variety of sauces—with bread made from a grain called teff. Zeyneb sat at the head of the table in a crimson dress and passed the dishes in a formal manner. Most of her family was there: one of her two daughters, three of her four sons, and six grandchildren. One of the sons—Meselu's uncle—spoke a little English, and he translated as well as his skill would allow. We couldn't understand a lot of it; we heard something about the election and the government. Zeyneb said something about adoption and things having changed. The grandchildren talked loudly and happily among themselves, listening sideways to the uncle's translations of our speech. Zeyneb asked how many children I had. When I said none, one of the little girls looked at me piercingly.

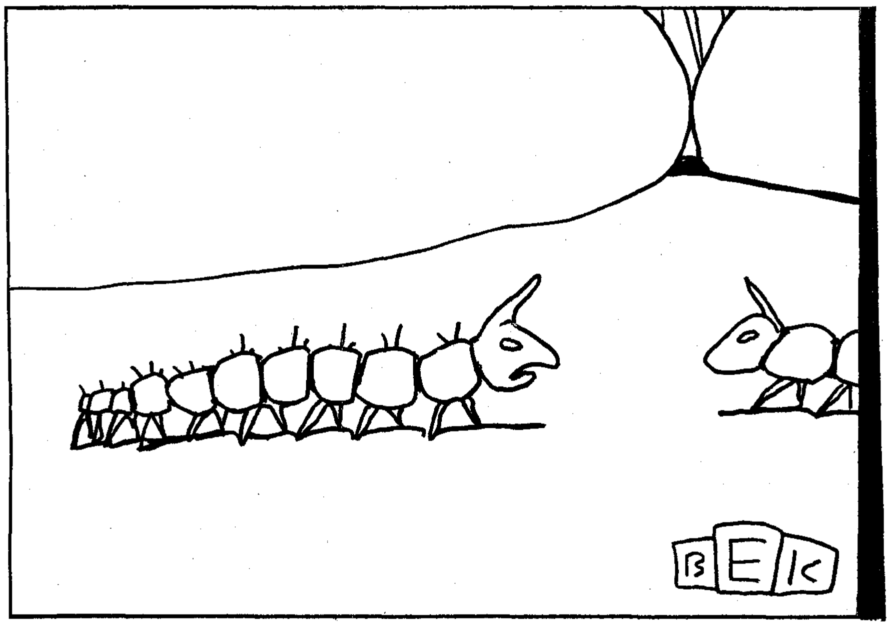
That night we went to bed early—we had to. The power was out and by eight-thirty it had got too dark to read. It was almost cold, so we slept with the windows shut; the muffled street sound had a lulling effect. Katya said she was too excited to sleep, but she drifted off quickly; I was the one who stirred all night, unable to sleep or to stay fully awake. The morning's wedding music crowded my mind, the bright colors and smiles, the running girls, the laughing woman. Cars mingled with donkeys. Beggars came bursting out of the wedding crowd, shouting. One of them was a boy I had seen that morning and tried not to notice, a boy with a gouged-out eye socket. We emptied our purses, but it was not enough.

I touched the wedding rings around my neck. Thomas appeared to me and sat on the bed. I stretched out my hand to him; the street crowd vanished. I remembered Thomas inside me. Children peered around a dark corner—first they were Zeyneb's grandchildren, then they were unborn children waiting for Thomas and me to conceive them. Among them was the boy with the gouged eye, not begging but waiting to be born. "I want you now," I whispered. Thomas answered, "I am here," but faintly. Chanting sounded. It was haunting, stern, as implacable as a machine. Rules, I thought. Punishment: it's coming. The chanting filled the suffocating room. "Shut up!" I hissed. "Just shut the fuck up!"

Katya stirred and murmured, "What?"

"This noise, what is it?"

"Zeyneb said it's from the churches. Go back to sleep—it's going to go on all day."



"I really hate most of my legs."

When Yonas came to pick us up at the hotel, he told us that every Saturday at this time of year people in Addis Ababa come out to get married and that our hotel was an especially popular spot because of the gardens. He was a young man with a profound feeling of age about him. When we told him how heavenly the weddings had seemed to us, he gravely bobbed his head and made the quick, sharp inhalation that we were beginning to understand as "yes." He held open the door of his rattling Soviet car for us and said something I didn't catch. We got in and sank into the broken, reeking cushions, almost down to the floor.

Yonas drove us to the first orphanage on our list. It was Catholic. It was a compound made of concrete, with a tin door, heavily patched with roofing tile, in a doorway that was big enough to drive a car through. A girl pocked with open sores and dressed in filthy rags was huddled near it, with a baby in her arms. I expected her to beg from us but she didn't have the strength; she didn't have the strength to swat the flies away. We tried to give her money—I bent down and held it in front of her face—but she didn't even look at it. She just stared at the door. We tried the door and found it locked. Katya knocked. No one came. I looked at the girl's baby; its eyelids were encrusted with parasites and swarming with flies. Katya knocked again, louder and longer. Street traffic went back and forth. Again, I tried to give the girl some money. She stared at the door as if I weren't there. I tried to look into the baby's eyes but its little face was numb with suffering; it didn't see me, either. Katya knocked again. We waited. I imagined children peering from behind the door. Finally, Katya turned away, her face white.

When we got back into the car we asked Yonas if there was something we could do for the girl with the baby.

He shook his head. "I don't think we can help her. Probably she's dying—she knows she's dying and she wants her baby to be taken into the orphanage when she does."

His tone was gentle and matter-of-fact, and there was no response to make to what he had said.

At the next orphanage we knocked and the door was opened. We were escorted through a barren courtyard and into a large office with a concrete floor. A girl dressed in shabby Western clothes passed by the open door, craning her head to look at us as she did. We waited half an hour before a young woman came to tell us that the director of the orphanage was not available. We asked when she might be available and the young woman shook her head. Katya asked if we might meet some of the children, anyway; again the young woman shook her head. "They are busy," she said.

No one in authority was available at the next orphanage, or the next one, or the one after that; all the children were busy. When we got back into the car, Katya said to Yonas, "Get us out of here. Please. Take us someplace out of the city. Someplace where we can breathe."

"David Brooks sure reads a lot of books."

We drove down a street of tin shanties and stalls hung with bananas and talismans that appeared to be made of hair; a dim electrical buzzing began in my ears. *He can't breathe.* Thomas's daughter, Elena, had said this just before he died. His breath had become faster and shallower. He was still alive, but decomposition had begun—I was so used to it that it didn't even seem horrible to me. I was so used to it that, even then, when I touched him, I could feel him. His warmth, his personality, everything that I had thought of as his physical energy: I still felt it when I put my hands on him; it was moving in him still. Though maybe now it was moving out of instead of through him.

We passed a street that looked like a dark pit letting loose its buildings and people. There was garbage strewn all around. A woman in a huge hat crouched in it, selling what looked like prepared food. I thought of Thomas's old aunt Lucinda in her big hat, picking through somebody's garage sale. Lucinda had raised Thomas, because one day, when he was seven, his mother had got on a bus and never come back. Lucinda had been the only member of his family to really accept me, and she was half-senile.

When Thomas and I met, Elena was already a young woman. I'd see her and her brother, Frank, on holidays, and our relationship was mostly polite. But when Thomas got sick she rented an apartment close to us. She was there for her father, but her feeling for me had changed, too; I could tell by the way her hip touched mine when she kissed me good night.

But Frank, the son—in the beginning he flirted with me, and by the end he was screaming about money. Especially he screamed about my having redone the bathroom with a luxury marble shower while his dad was sick—but that damn shower was one of the last things that Thomas had been coherent about. He had wanted it, not me.

The buzzing in my ears grew louder. "Look!" Katya cried. Out the window, there was a smiling lion carved into a stony hill, climbing three steps at the top of which a Coca-Cola bottle announced a refreshment stand. We parked, and Yonas hired two teen-agers to take us up into the mountains for three U.S. dollars.

We walked for about two hours. The landscape was densely beautiful. The sky was a soft rolling gray, deep and full of round shapes amid stretches of radiant blankness. Beneath us was a valley in which grew dark clumps of bushes and trees, pale grasses and deep patches of earth. We passed farmers with wooden plows drawn by oxen, turning up soil and chunks of stone so crystalline they gave light back to the sun. I wished that Thomas were there to see it all.

And then he *was* there. I was flooded with memories of our first meeting: I was twenty-four and he was fifty-two. People say that young women are attracted to older men because of social power. But my response was like strong weather—not chosen, not social. I was a graduate student and he was a visiting writer and a party was being held for him in the house of some faculty eminence. It was dull, and I went out into the yard to play with somebody's dog, a chocolate-spotted terrier with a chewed-up ball that I threw until it landed in a pond with a skin of chartreuse scum. The dog and I were looking through the weeds at the water's edge when the guest of honor appeared with a drink in his hand. "Did you lose something?" he asked. He wore an elegant suit and expensive shoes. He was ripe, confident, bursting with sex. "The dog's ball," I said. "It went in the water, I think." And, still holding his drink, he walked into the water in his suit and his expensive shoes and got it for me.

I shifted my eyes. White seeped into the soft gray of the sky; the earth hummed through the waving hairs of its pale grasses, its bright leaves, the pores of its dark flesh. My body remembered the flesh of my husband's arms, the warm intelligence of his chest, his willful, goatish belly.

I quickly dried my eyes. One of the teen-agers turned to us. Yonas said, "O.K., we're here."

He had brought us to a church that was built into a ravine. Looking at it was like looking down into a ruined palace, a system of courtyards, chambers, and antechambers that instead of being built into the air had been carved into the earth. There were steps down into it, but they were eroded and overgrown. Still, we made our way down slowly, crouching and clutching at bushes and vines that felt alive enough to close over our heads and swallow us whole, not like an animal but like an element.

Inside, the church seemed to have been carved so that it would appear nearly

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FAITH AND DOUBT

HYPOCRITES

On those Wednesday afternoons when I was Reader for all-school Mass, I would leave class early, confident yet stressed, like a little businessman, and hustle down to the sacristy, where I'd read the Epistle passage aloud so that Father X could check my pronunciation. He'd mark the reading with one of several silk ribbons bound into the pages, and I'd take the book out to the lectern and stand there a minute, thinking, Soon I'll be up here, and the light will be on me, and the church will be full of my friends.

Normally on Wednesdays I found Father X working at something in the sacristy. This Wednesday, I came up the aisle quietly, so quietly that I discovered Father X and a nun I'll call Sister Y in the middle of—well, I couldn't figure out what they were doing. It appeared to be some particularly athletic form of kissing, involving tongues and a lot of snakelike extraneous limb and torso motion, as if this new kind of kissing were filling them with painful electricity.

Sister Y was extremely tall. She had taken part in our Student-Faculty basketball game that fall, a ringer despite having to play in her habit. She was the tallest person on the court by at least eight inches. Also, she had skills. By the end of the game (a rout, Faculty obliterating Students), her cheeks were red with the exhilaration of universal domination. She outscored her lay male teammates, barked bits of technical strategy, shook her head in disgust when her orders were botched. In the stands, early muffled hilarity gave way to respectful silence, applause, shouted encouragement. The nun, it was conceded, could play.

Now here she was, French-kissing Father X, while Father X pinned her against the black-topped counter, one leg riding up between hers. Something about their position suggested a mother bird feeding her young. She was reaching down to give him something; he was reaching up to take it. Behind them, aghast, sat the holy implements.

Father X, it had been rumored, was gay. He was pale, slight.

Hereby that rumor was refuted.

Or at least complicated.

I stood watching. (In memory, I am frozen in midstep, one sneakered foot in the air, my mouth a little O, like the mouth on a choirboy in a glass Christmas town.)

Then I backed silently out.

Wow wow wow.

There was no way I had just seen that.

What a world, that contained even this.

By now I knew enough about the time in which I was living to know that one of our fundamental narratives was that a critical moment of disillusion could be followed by a bitter but justified downward slide into decadence. Having seen what I had seen, in other words, entitled me to cry *Hypocrites!* and leave religion behind forever.

These people, these priests and nuns, dominated our lives, bossed us around, shamed us for our crass actions (writing with dull pencils, whispering excitedly when it started to rain outside the classroom window), actions that were even more appalling when juxtaposed against the fact that Christ had bled and died for us.

And now this.

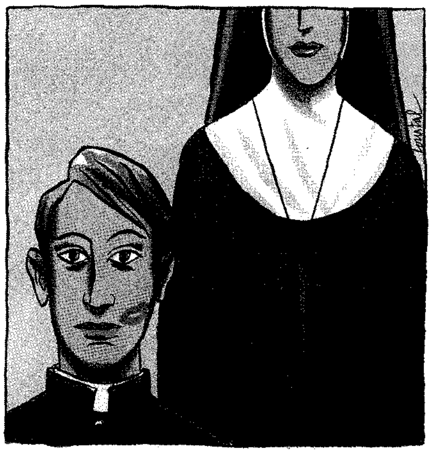
Hypocrites! (I tried it on for size.)

This vignette proved, in effect, that the whole religion deal was a sham.

Didn't it?

In a moment of clarity I saw that it did not. The kiss proved only that two young vow-makers had failed in their vows. It did not debunk the act of vowing. If I ever made a vow, I knew, I would keep it. Therefore my feelings and insights vis-à-vis God were as valid, arguably more valid, than those of Father X and Sister Y, who now seemed pitiable, weak, and left behind. Already, this early in their lives, they had failed their own best selves.

Then something long festering began to rise in me. If these two, who'd been vetted by the system, and who actively, and every day, professed their belief in that system, and lectured us on our failings, could so surreptitiously defy, even insult, the system, didn't this suggest that the system's most senior representatives (Monsignor A, for example, venerable, cranky, ordained just after the First World War) might also be merely human, and thereby flawed? Mightn't the system, supposedly overseen in even its smallest details by God Himself, via these representatives, actually be just a crude, man-made form, inspired by, but inaccurately addressing, even obscuring, some greater and more difficult-to-discern truth? A truth that was still out there, waiting to be discerned? By me?



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

Yes, it's just you and Me now, Jesus said inside me. You can know Me all on your own. In fact, that is how you must know Me.

I went loudly back up the aisle (coughing, coughing again, whistling, letting out a weary "Oh man!" as if pre-exhausted by all the reading I was about to do), then plopped down in the second row and paged through a missalette.

Out came Sister Y, looking beautiful in the way someone will when she has just, against all sense, done exactly what she most wanted to. She strode past me on those mile-long legs, her sensible nun shoes making a hollow *klopf-klopf*, the sound of Joy itself agreeing to some pragmatic temporary reconstraint.

I went into the sacristy and got my Epistle assignment from Father X, who dealt with me so much as usual—as if I were outraging and boring him at once—that my opinion of mankind's duplicity was elevated on the spot.

Beautiful world! I was happy all day.

It was a serious thing I had seen. I knew that. For ten years I told no one. Then, in college, I told a crowd of drunks at a frat party. By that time, it was just a joke; there was no more sacred air in the balloon. Father X and Sister Y had left the Church years earlier—not at the same time, not for each other, but separately, for the generalized possibility of others, amid the endemic tumult of the era.

Since then, I've told this story so often that I find myself wondering if, over time, I haven't somehow conflated my nuns. Isn't Sister Y, with her great height, kind of too good to be true? My God, could the nun, in fact, have been—

Sister W (average height, Egyptian-looking, the wittiest and most aloof of our nuns)?

Less likely, but still possible: Sister Z (who, weeks after leaving the convent, showed up at the annual fundraiser—"Cabaret!"—in pink hot pants)?

No. At this writing, my money is strongly on Sister Y.

But, if I'm wrong, and you're still alive, Sister Y, a very tall sixty-something former nun, and I've offended you, I apologize. With age goes memory, and confidence in one's memories, and I'm old now, oldish anyway, decades older than you were, all those years ago, when you kissed Father X, or someone did.

Little did I know (as I returned to class, giddy with my secret) that my days as a Reader were numbered. Soon afterward, I was fired by Monsignor A because my hair was too long. I looked, he told me, disgust in his voice, "like an Airedale puppy." My hair barely reached the top of my ears. I was not given the option of cutting it. I was just out. I understood. For a sin as grave as mine—offending ancient, inflexible Monsignor A, at a time when it must have seemed to him that all the Church had fallen into open rebellion—there could be no sufficient act of contrition.

—*George Saunders*

natural, an expression of the earth's mind. In its decay it was covered with lichen, deep-colored moss, and small trees; it smelled like rock and humus. There were remnants of stone arches in the roof, thickly overgrown with clinging vines. Niches were cut into the walls, and in the niches were stone figures whose faces were worn away. There were stone benches, too, like pews. Further inside there was another short descent into a grotto, a chapel with a stream of water running through it like a vein of shining blood. The steps descending into the chapel were intact so the descent was not that difficult. Still, there was the sense that we might not be able to return. We reached the bottom and stood wordlessly absorbing a feeling of power that was embodied by earth but was bigger than earth. Again came the fear of being swallowed, but also a desire to be swallowed, as if by a lover. I clasped my hands and bent my head. Instead of prayer, a memory came to me, half-blotted in darkness; a memory of my cheek on the floor, my knees spread, my eyes closed, my body naked.

I loosed my hands and looked up. The memory passed, or became a memory of something else, someone else—someone I had not thought of for years, someone I had not really thought of at all. She was Thomas's first wife, Frank and Elena's mother; he had left her to be with me. I had never met her but I had seen her once, when Thomas and I were walking down the street in Manhattan. He took my arm abruptly and muttered her name under his breath. I looked and saw a small middle-aged woman in glasses looking fixedly ahead as she passed. I turned away, embarrassed. But now I saw her vividly. I saw her and felt her loneliness. On the street she had looked about fifty—the age I am now.

For two days, wherever we went no one was available to speak with us. Finally, we went back to the first place we had tried. This time the dying girl was not there—though I thought I could make out a shadow, perhaps an indentation or a soft mark, where she had lain. We knocked for a while and were about to go when the door was opened.

The head nun was a tall, erect woman with a still, cold face and fiery eyes, whose fire seemed to come from far away, far down in the hole of herself. We sat with her in her office and she told us the story of another woman who had come to do an independent adoption; the story took almost an hour to tell, and it ended with the woman leaving Addis Ababa to look elsewhere. As an afterthought, the nun added that, at present, she had no babies.

"But what about the girl who was outside the door a few days ago?" Katya asked. "She was obviously very sick and she had a beautiful baby and I was wondering if you took that baby in?"

The nun said that if the girl was sick she was probably with her family now. And then she made it clear that we were to leave.

Some version of this episode was repeated at several other orphanages. Finally, Katya went to the ministry that oversees adoptions, to meet with the man everyone referred to as "the Head"; we never found out what his actual title was. He suggested that we go to an orphanage on the outskirts of town, but when we got there we were told that they had no babies available, either. Just as the supervisor, or whatever she was, told us this, a baby began crying in the next room.

Katya stood up, one hand on her hip, the other pointing toward the sound. "And what," she demanded, "is that?"

"Obviously, that is a baby," the woman said stiffly. "But as this baby has AIDS he is not up for adoption in America."

Katya sat back down; she put her head in her hands. "I'm sorry," she said. "I don't mean to be rude."

The supervisor sighed and leaned back in her chair. She looked out the window for a long time. When she looked back, she said, "I should not tell you this, but I am going to tell you. The Head told us that you were coming. And he explicitly told us that we were not to do any independent adoptions. That's it. No independent adoptions."

Katya jumped up. "But he told us to come here!"

"If he has changed his mind," the woman said, "then he needs to put it in writing. You need to get a letter from him stating that he gives permission. And I doubt he will give it to you."

The next day Katya was sick with diarrhea and couldn't eat anything but a banana. Still, we went to see the Head. Katya went in to meet him in his office; I stayed in the car with Yonas. He talked to me about the election; he said that the government had lied about the results in order to hold on to power and that people were going to fight about it. I asked him how he had learned to speak English so well. He said that he had studied it at the university and that driving had given him the chance to practice. He had studied for only a year even though he loved it; his brother and sister had children and he needed to help make money for them so that they

SPRING

The road the road just south of Frenchtown the poem
the one by Mordecai the river the river the
one on my left if I am travelling north the
car a box with wires loose on top of my
left leg the radio fine the light behind
behind the clock not working the rose so dead
I am ashamed the crows too shiny their feathers
too wet the cliff on my right too red the blood
the blood of an animal, a skunk, they bleed
and stink, they stink and bleed, the monkey on top
of me, a New World monkey, not a howler,
an organ-grinder monkey, a capuchin,
his small red hat is on my head and he's
on my back, he's dropping orange peels down my neck
March 22nd on the Delaware River.

—*Gerald Stern*

could get the best education possible.

Katya came out and said, "What a prick!" She got in the car and slammed the door. "Sorry for my language, Yonas. The agencies must've gotten to him—that's the only explanation. He said I don't need a letter, so why should he write me a letter? I said, 'How am I going to get a child?' He said, 'That's your concern, not mine.'"

Yonas drove us back to the hotel. "I just don't know what to do," Katya said. "We can't stay here forever. I don't know what to do. God, I feel sick." She took out her cell phone and began rifling through her purse.

"Who are you calling?" I asked.

"A guy named Kebede. Meselu gave me his number. He's a sort of liaison between the hospital and orphanages in Arba Minch. I didn't want to call because he's in a whole other city. But I don't know what else to try."

Yonas muttered unhappily; we were suddenly floating in a flood of people and donkeys. Katya got Kebede on the phone. Music came from somewhere, lots of instruments blended energetically. I smiled; I remembered the first time that Thomas and I had had really good sex. Afterward, he'd put on some old pop music and danced in his underwear. He'd danced comically but also intently. The song played: *I've got a hard-ass pair of shoulders. I've got a love you can't imagine.* Katya frowned into the phone, covering her other ear. "Really?" she said. "You know the Head?" Suddenly her voice was round and shining. Thomas danced; the car bucked forward; we rolled past a graveyard of white tombs and faceless angels standing guard over the dead. Katya hung up the phone. "He has a child," she said. *A love you can't imagine.* "A boy. Almost two. His mother dropped him off at the local hospital and hasn't been back for six months. The hospital just gave the child to Kebede and he's at Kebede's house—he hasn't gone into the orphanage yet, so the rules don't apply to him. Kebede says to call back tomorrow." She looked as if she'd been struck by lightning.

Two days later, we were on a plane to Arba Minch. The weather was turbulent and the small jet bobbed like an open boat on choppy water. Katya clutched her armrests. She was still too sick to eat, and her thinness made the taut, tense nature of her will more visible. I stood slightly and looked into the cockpit; the door was open and I could see the pilots. They were leaning back in their seats, laughing and talking as if they were sharing a very good joke.

I said, "The pilots look drunk."

"Oh, sit down," Katya said.

I sat down and looked out the window; the wing was vibrating ferociously. I began to sweat.

"I loved Thomas," I said. "I loved him right up until the end."

"I know," Katya said. "I know you did."

The plane dropped suddenly, then steadied, then rose above the clouds. The sun hit the wing with piercing brilliance.

"I loved him," I said.

"Yes," Katya said.

"But I was unfaithful."

Katya turned to face me, her fear interrupted by her surprise.

"It was only once. One person, once. A student. Not even technically a student—he had just graduated." I spoke rapidly.

"How did it happen?"

"He was someone I really disliked—rude in class, so arrogant it made him stupid. It was clear that he disliked me, too. I was glad to be getting rid of him. Then we saw each other at the graduation party and he came over to talk to me. I was surprised at first. Then I realized after about two minutes that it wasn't exactly dislike he felt for me. And I didn't dislike him, either. And I knew that Thomas wouldn't be surprised if I came home late."

"Was Thomas sick by then?"

It was a blow, but I could not be angry at her for striking it. "Yes," I said, "but I didn't know it yet. He had become very bad-tempered and strange—he was always starting fights and yelling at me, cursing at me, which he'd never done before. I was really mad at him. That partly explains why I did it, but not fully. I can't explain it fully. I wanted sex and I wanted it to hurt. Not physically but . . ."

"I know," Katya said. She said it quickly, as though to stop me from saying more.

I looked out the window. Below us was a forest of textured green, a still mass of depth and roughness, of mes-

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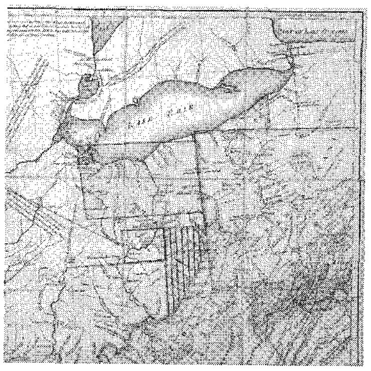

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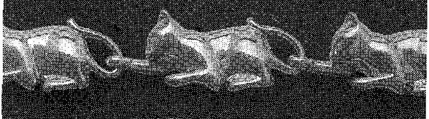

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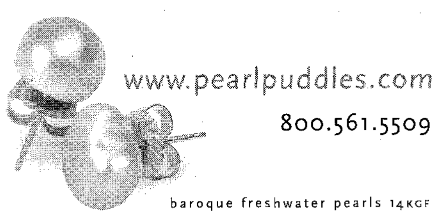
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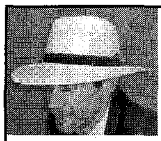
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merizing sameness. I looked at it and my thoughts dissolved like foam on an ocean.

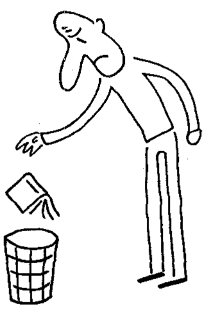
"I didn't know that he was sick," I said. "But I could tell that something was changing, that he was leaving me. The parts of Thomas that I knew were leaving."

Katya put her hand on my arm and stroked it. Beneath us the forest fell away. We flew over bare ochre earth. I sat on the bed next to Thomas and tried to coax a spoonful of soup into his mouth. He wouldn't take it. I closed my eyes. On one side of me was the dark image of my grief. On the other was bright sky, a rattling plastic window, and the torn edge of my seat cushion. How strange the contrast. How strange that I wished I could return to that moment of sitting on the bed, trying to get Thomas to take a spoonful of soup.

When we landed, Kebede was waiting for us in an old pickup truck. He was a small, fine-boned man with a high-bridged nose, unsmiling, his eyes quick and clear. He asked did we want to see the baby now, or go to the hotel first? Katya said, "The baby, please."

As we neared the town, the vegetation became more lush. We glimpsed a great blue body of water between the trees and rich greenery. We turned down a street of stone houses mostly hidden behind walls and gates.

Kebede's house was small but elegantly constructed, of big smooth stones contrasting with a door deliberately made of rough wooden planks. His young daughter greeted us and led us into a long, narrow room. A woman in a vermilion dress emerged from a side room with a crying baby in her arms. "This is Sofia, my wife," Kebede said. Smiling, Sofia handed the baby to Katya. The baby stopped crying. Cradling him, Katya looked at us, grinning as if she had given birth.



The baby was beautiful, fragile and small for almost two, with a severe mouth, a high forehead, almond-shaped eyes, and slightly pointed ears that made his gaze seem radically attuned. When you held him you felt the pure unprotected tenderness of an infant, but in those eyes there was also something uncanny and strong, nascent and vibrating with the desire to take form. He had come to the hospital half-starved, with pneumonia and parasites, and although he was now healthy he was still undernourished and weak.

Sofia made us all a pasta dish with spicy onion purée, so spicy that I could barely eat it, so spicy that Katya didn't dare eat it. I wouldn't have expected even a robust baby to eat something so strong, but this baby ate it. He ate and conveyed with each bite, *I intend to thrive.* "Son," Katya said. "Sonny. I'm going to name him Sonny."

When we were done eating we took Sonny back to the hotel. Sofia and her older daughter, an eleven-year-old in braids whose name was Mekdes, went with us. Mekdes was amazed at the hotel's plumbing; she kept turning the water on and off. Katya was itching to buy baby food and clothes—what Sonny had on was filthy—so Sofia made Mekdes calm down and instructed her to watch the baby while we went shopping.

"Can she do that?" Katya asked. "At her age?"

"Of course she can," Sofia said. "She's cared for children younger than this."

The clothing store was a dark little hole stuffed with boxes of ridiculously ugly baby clothes from Eastern Europe; Katya loaded her arms with them. Sofia's phone rang and she turned her back to us to answer it. Smiling, Katya held up an orange corduroy jumper with a lavender collar. Sofia turned to us. "Stop," she said. "You have to stop. This is my husband. The mother just came back to the hospital. She is very angry. She wants her baby back."

Kebede drove us to the hospital. Sofia held Sonny; Katya didn't want to. She had pulled into herself and become very contained. Kebede told us that the hospital staff were upset with the mother for showing up after leaving the child for so long.

"Why?" Katya said tonelessly. "It's her right."

"She's a day laborer," Kebede said. "She lives outdoors. She lives from hand to mouth. The hospital staff say she's retarded. The baby will die with her."

A crowd was gathered in front of the hospital, and they came forward to meet us when we got out of the car. They were all talking loudly, but my eyes went to the only silent person among them: a small, beaten-looking woman with long dirty hair and flat breasts hanging way down her body. She was dressed in filthy ragged clothes, and earrings had been torn from her ears. Her eyes were small and hot, and I could not read their expression. Her eyes went past me and fell on Katya. Katya steadily returned the look; I could not read her expression, either. Sofia came forward and put the baby in his mother's arms. Everyone fell silent. The mother glanced at Sofia, went toward Katya, and tried to hand the baby to her. Katya automatically reached for the baby, but before she could take him Kebede stepped in and took him. The baby screamed and reached for his mother. Looking meaningfully at the mother, Kebede gave the sobbing baby to a female hospital staffer. The staffer handed the child back to his mother. The mother took the child, walked around the staffer, and tried to approach Katya again. Everybody was yelling by then. Kebede moved in front of the mother, blocking her. The baby screamed. Katya hung her head and turned back to the car, both hands pressed against her chest.

It was over in less than five minutes. After the mother had walked away with the baby, Sofia went to the car to comfort Katya. I was too stunned by the scene to leave it that quickly. Kebede stood awhile talking with the hospital people, but I could not understand what they were saying.

When we got back to the hotel, Katya lay down in bed. "This was a mistake," she said. "An arrogant mistake. People told me that and they were right. I have been lazy and selfish all my life and I think I can just come and buy a kid, after living in a world that stole the ground out from under his parents and his grandparents and sucked the blood out of them and—"

I said, "Don't start with that. You aren't buying a kid. You're not giving anyone money. Even as a metaphor it doesn't work—Ethiopia never sold slaves."

"Don't give me that shit. This isn't an English class. You know there's truth in what I say. And, anyway, I am sick of everything always being wrong. Every relationship I've ever had there's been some reason it couldn't work. Even with sex, half the time there's something in the way—somebody is scared or married, or I touched him the wrong way or he said the wrong thing and it's gone. And now this. Maybe I deserve it."

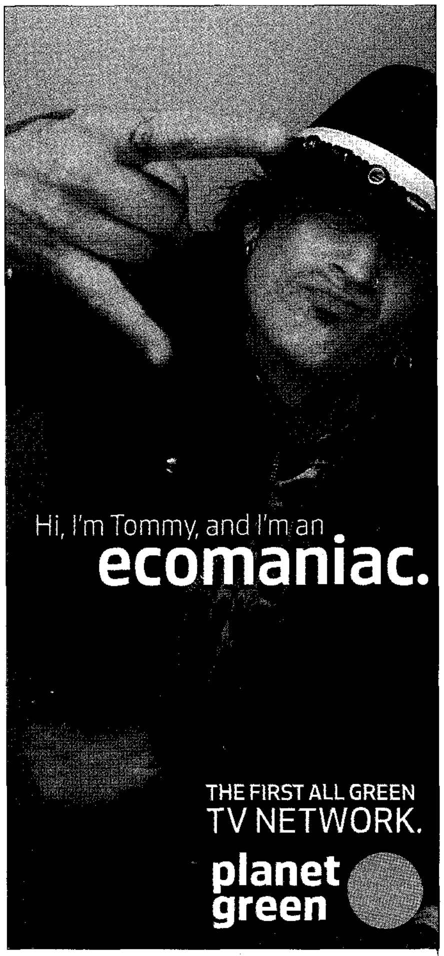
"Katya," I said, "that mother wants you to have her baby. I saw it. You saw it. Wait and see what happens."

We lay in the darkness and heat and talked about the baby and the mother and how the mother had looked when she had seen Katya—we tried to understand what her expression had meant. Soon it was too hot to talk, too hot to think. Again and again we got up for water. Then we got up to piss and it came out scalding. The dark and heat became a private maze we wandered through, in and out of a delirium that passed as sleep. Far away I stood in front of a classroom, talking about a girl carrying her dead baby through a dark forest; I was lecturing on Chekhov's "In the Ravine." There were a dozen students in that class, but Kevin was the only one whose face I saw before me. He was right to despise me—I, who had no child, lecturing on this experience, as if I knew. I read aloud from the story something that a peasant said to the girl: "Yours is not the worst of sorrows."

But it was. I had wanted him to hurt me, and he had. Or at least I thought he had. In fact, the real shock and pain came a few weeks later, along with something worse: Thomas's Alzheimer's was diagnosed. He was hurt, too, and I had done it to him. Or at least it felt as if I had.

Katya stirred and talked in her sleep. I felt a protective tenderness, a feeling that could not fill the emptiness but softened it. A single word came to me: "faith." This is not a word I use often or hear used often, except lightly, ignorantly, or manipulatively. But there it was, standing singly in my head. This word has meaning, I thought. Whatever it has faithlessly been made to mean, it has actual meaning. But it was very little to hold on to.

In the morning, we went down to the dining room for breakfast. I ate fruit and a little plastic container of vanilla pudding; Katya had coffee and a piece of bread. There were some Italians talk-



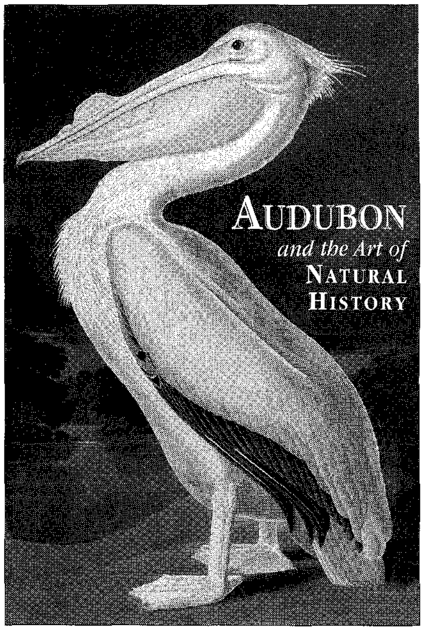


Plate 311, *American White Pelican*
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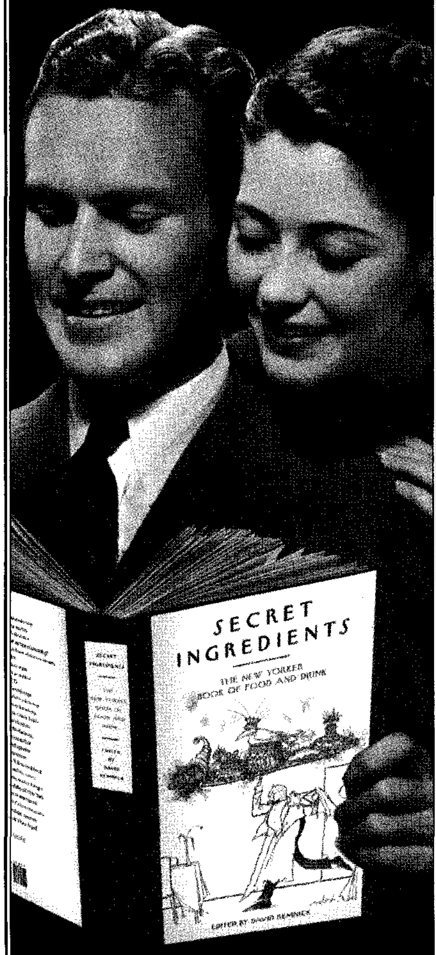

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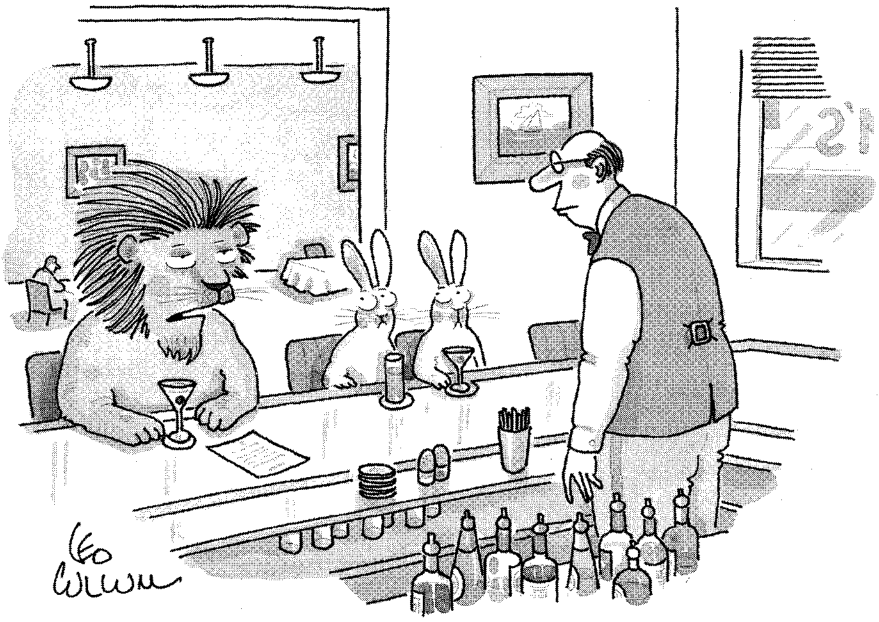


"I'll just eat at the bar."

• •

ing about the election a few tables over; we heard them say something about getting out of the country. Then they glanced at us and fell silent. We took our coffee and went outside to the terrace. The air was warm, thriving and dense with the smell of earth and minerals. We sat quietly for a bit. A car went past, blaring pop music. Two boys walked by, driving two skinny cows, lustily slapping their bony haunches with whiplike branches.

Katya said, "Being here is like being in Biblical times and modern times at the same time. Like all times are happening at once, and people are just walking back and forth between them."

Not walking, I thought—falling.

Katya's cell phone rang in her lap. Irritated, she picked it up and listened; her attention went taut like a bow. She dropped the phone and shouted, "The mother brought the baby back!" Then she grabbed the phone again. It was Kebede. The mother had slept outside the hospital all night with the baby. She wanted to put him up for adoption, and she wanted Katya to have him.

It took a few days for the mother to do the paperwork, but we got Sonny right away. We went back to the store of ugly clothes and bought a little suitcaseful. We bathed Sonny and dressed him. But he would not stop screaming. It seemed to Katya that the baby screamed most when she tried to hold him. Sofia came to help us. She brought more of the spicy pasta dish that Sonny had devoured on the day we met him, but he refused it with a frown that was deep and imperial. He refused to eat at all. "Maybe he wants to go back to his mother," Katya said. "Do you think that's what he's saying?"

"Nonsense," Sofia said. "Don't even think it. They were sleeping outside during malaria season. Do you know what that means? The baby is already weak. If he stayed with that woman he would die."

"And, besides, he's bossy like you," I said. "Did you see the frown on him?"

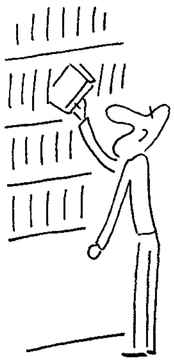
And so we came before the judge. We took Sonny back to Addis Ababa. He screamed the whole flight. But Katya was unfazed; the strength of her doubt was now transformed and was feeding her determination. Exhausted but almost mechanically activated, we were carried forward on a current of will that we had initiated, but which had become a force of its own.

Yonas met us at the airport and took us to a bed-and-breakfast exclusively for people who were in Addis to adopt, a compound with barbed wire and shards of glass atop its high walls.

Because Sonny tended to get carsick, I stayed at the B. and B. with him while Yonas drove Katya around the city getting letters to prove who she was and who Sonny was, translations of these letters into English or Amharic, and a birth certificate, a passport, and a visa for Sonny. Katya mounted a daily assault on the Head, from whom she needed to get a letter of approval for an orphanage to sponsor the adoption. Each of these tasks was, of course, impossible. When I tell the story to people, I make it sound as if Katya flowed through the city, coursing around the obstacles in her path with the smooth determination of water. But she was not water and she came home bruised and furious from bumping her head against every damn thing.

My time alone was dreamlike and lullingly dull, the surreal darkness of grief blended with the bright reality of caring for a malnourished child. Sonny's movements were weak, uncoördinated. He couldn't walk more than a few steps and his gaze was intense but not quite focussed, as if he were in a mild psychic fever. He just wanted to be carried around the house, out into the yard and back, again and again.

The first day I carried him until I couldn't take any more, then I lay on the floor and rolled back and forth with him, as he clung to me weakly, but with a hint of triumph in his raised head. I rocked him and crooned to him and dreamed of Thomas: of rocking him and crooning, of being rocked by him. Of straddling my husband and kissing him, bending to brush my breasts against him; of straddling him and struggling to reposition him on the bed, him cursing me with strange half-words because he could no longer move himself.



Sonny put his hand on my face and it came away wet. I kissed his tiny palm and held it. Thomas lost motor control and could get into bed only by moving into a sitting position over it and then letting himself flop backward. I had to allow him to do it that way—it was important for him to do what he could. But then I had to reposition him, because if I left him as he fell, he woke in pain. It made Thomas furious to be straddled and repositioned. Yet I treasured his fury, as a vestige of his pride, treasured the fact that it could still trigger anger in me, make me feel like a normal wife again with a strong husband to quarrel with. I gave Sonny my finger; he squeezed it and I rolled into a seated position, cradling him.

Friends ask me when I suspected that something was wrong with Thomas. I don't know how to answer. There were indications, most of them disguised as age and its eccentricities. But at least once the disease paraded itself garishly before me. Four years before the Alzheimer's was diagnosed, we went to Spain for three weeks. We arrived home in the evening, left our bags in the front hall, and went to bed. The next morning I found him sitting in the kitchen, visibly afraid. He had no memory of our trip, yet he realized when he saw our bags in the hall that we had been somewhere. I made breakfast; I described for him everything we had done on the trip. He said that he remembered, and I made myself forget it. And, because nothing quite like that happened again, I could.

After a few days, Sonny began to eat in earnest—mashed bananas, cereal, formula, pasta, all of it. He built pyramids of empty film containers and prescription bottles, and then knocked them down. He unscrewed and screwed the top on the milk bottle over and over. He discovered that he wanted to walk and then—as if a bomb had gone off in his brain—he discovered that he could try to walk up and down the stairs. I passed through a sad and enchanted mirror: I walked Sonny as I had walked Thomas, facing him, his hands in mine, giving him a footstep pattern to follow, holding his eyes with encouragement. Everything depended on the slow placement of his blunt feet, finding it, trusting it, finding it again.

Everything depended on it: I pulled my husband out of bed to a standing position and led him backward, holding his hands. I smiled at him and he smiled at me. I got him on the john, waited for him to finish, and wiped him. I bathed him in the marble

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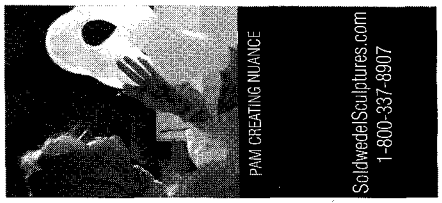

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shower, which was so big it made the whole room a shower where we could be naked together. We sat on the fancy marble floor and played, passing the hose back and forth, spraying, laughing.... And Sonny, with his little forehead blazing, several times nearly falling, climbed the stairs. His hands radiated into my hands, imparting his being and sampling mine. "Look," I said aloud. Look, my husband, my father, my lover, my child: look at this little boy and bless him.

When Katya came home she would jealously take the baby from me—of course, jealously. Every day she walked in and saw me having intimacy that she couldn't have because she was out doing the shit. What she didn't see was that it didn't matter. Sonny knew that Katya was his mother and that I was his nurse; we hadn't imagined that uncanny gleam in his eyes.

On our seventh day in Addis, Katya succeeded; she came back with a letter from the Head and a letter from an orphanage (run by a friend of the Head) that said it would sponsor the adoption. Out of fighting mode, she was dazed and unsure of how this had happened. "We were going at it as usual," she said. "I told him I would be back in his office every day until I got permission and he said, 'Fine.' And then a stomach cramp doubled me over; my head went between my legs, my teeth were gritted, and my intestines made this indescribable sound—I thought I was going to have diarrhea right there. The only reason I didn't leave was that I was worried about what might happen if I got up suddenly. He didn't say anything. He just looked at me—almost like he felt sorry for me! Then he got a piece of paper and wrote the letter and pushed it across the desk."

That night we finally went out for dinner. We wore the dresses we had brought to celebrate in; Sonny wore his orange jumper. I chose an Italian restaurant we'd walked past several times because the people in it always looked lively. But it wasn't lively this night. On the way there the streets were nearly empty, and the few people out seemed angry and tense. We were the only customers in the restaurant. Katya didn't feel well enough to eat more than a few bites of pasta and she was too tired to talk much.

The next day Katya and Sonny went to the American Embassy in the morning and returned early in the afternoon. Sonny was tired and cranky, so Katya wanted to rest before going to the travel agency to arrange our flight out. They napped together while I went to the laundry room and washed our clothes. While I was in the dining area waiting for the clothes to come out of the washer I met the mother of our host, a neurasthenic Italian fellow who had written several unpublished books. She was feeding her pug dog sliced fruit from a dish in her lap. I told her we were about to leave. "I hope you can get out," she said. "You chose a terrible time to come. You didn't know about the election?" I pointed out that she was here. She shrugged and meticulously peeled the skin off a fig. "I spent my childhood here," she said. "I know the place. You don't."

I woke Katya and we tried to call Yonas. We couldn't reach him. This was unusual. We waited an hour and tried again; nothing. We waited another hour. We heard the huge gate open; people came in talking loudly. Someone ran up the stairs, past our door. Katya and I stared at each other. Sonny stirred. It wasn't right then that we heard gunfire, but maybe ten minutes later. Not close by. But close enough to hear. Off and on, during the afternoon and into the night.

Much closer than the gunshots was the buzzing machine of my body. The buzzing came from inside me and also enclosed me like the darkness and the warmth of the night. It said, *It doesn't matter if you die here. It might be better if you died here. But Katya and Sonny have to get home. It won't be better if they die.*

The next day, Yonas came in his uncle's car instead of his taxi. We saw him pull in to the driveway, and we ran out to meet him. From the car, he held up a hand to indicate that he was talking on the phone. We stopped; he had never signalled for us to wait before, and this signal scared me more than anything so far. But he didn't keep us waiting long. He put the phone down and got out to tell us: There had been a demonstration about the election. Twenty-five people had been killed. He could not take us anywhere. He would be in touch. He had to get home as quickly as he could.

We played with Sonny all day, both of us, going up and down the stairs. When we heard shots, we looked up and then went back to what we were doing. The buzzing said, *Your parents are dead. Your husband is dead. You should be dead. But Katya and Sonny don't deserve to die.*

In the early evening, Katya said, "We have to get something to eat."

"We can't go out," I said. "It isn't safe."

"Sonny is out of food. He hasn't eaten for eight hours."

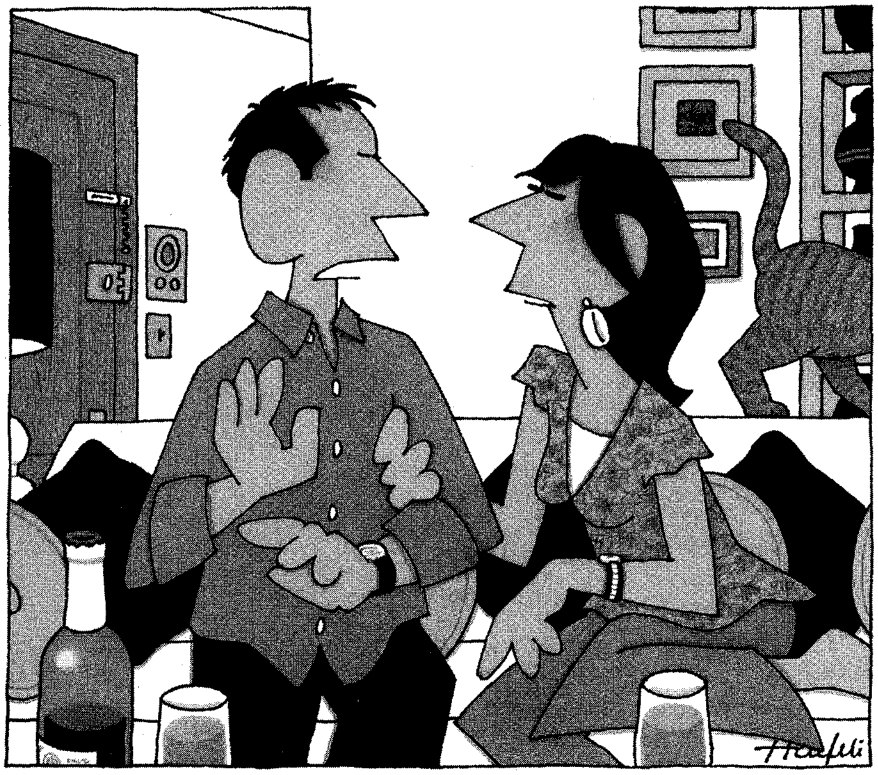
"Katya, nothing is open. You heard Yonas."

"The fruit stand will be open. There's no way they'll close. They're just down the street."

"We're hearing guns."

"The shots aren't close. I have to go out. If you won't go, I'll go alone."

We took Sonny; I carried him, because Katya was too weak. Outside on the street people and animals were walking around normally. Who were these people? I felt half-scared of them, half-linked with them, and didn't know which feeling was most real. I reached inside my shirt and held the rings for a moment in my cupped hand. Thomas's face, flat and beautifully misshapen, rippled in me like a reflection in water. There was a boy at my side, trying to push a cow out of the way. Thomas's face stretched unrecognizably on the moving water. The boy came suddenly around the cow and tore my chain off my neck. I screamed; the boy flashed down the street. I was after him. My legs are long and I almost had him but couldn't grab him, because Sonny was screaming, forgotten, in my arms. I darted back to Katya, who was standing motionless, and thrust Sonny at her. The boy was a quick pixilation of limbs, disappearing. Katya shouted, "Janice!" and I ran. The boy was a bright movement that I chased like a creature with a single instinct. I turned a corner, stumbled into a pothole full of warm brown water, and nearly fell. I staggered and bent to catch myself with my hands. I looked up; he was gone. I whipped my head around, looking, my instinct trying to leap in every direction—but it had nothing to leap at. I panted heavily, sweat running into my eyes. Ragged women holding children stared



"It wouldn't be fair for us to get married until gays can be legally married, too. That's my story and I'm sticking to it."

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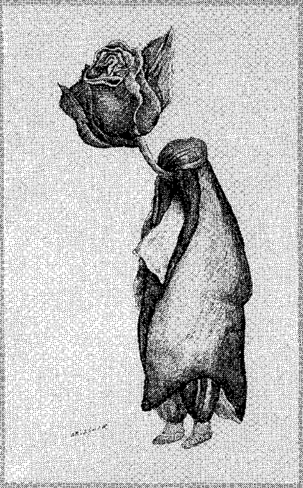

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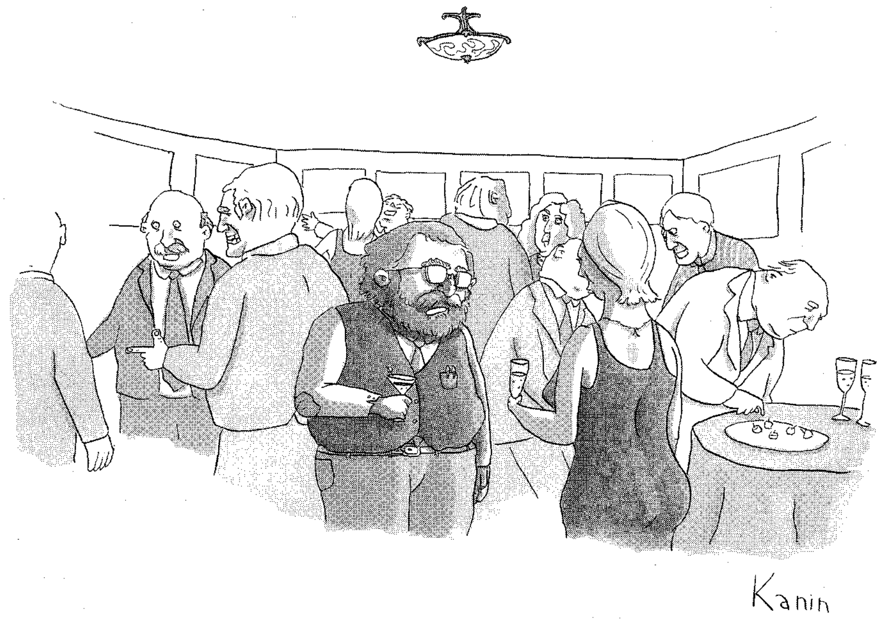

“The key to being a writer is to take all the sadness and turmoil deep in the center of your being and channel it into a diet cookbook.”

• •

at me. Faces peered from the broken hole of a window. Skeletal dogs, fierce and cringing, watched with starving eyes. My instinct felt them all as it felt itself: quick force in slow mammal bodies; soft brain in hard bone; a machine of thoughts; a machine of sex; the dark radiance of emotions; the personality; eyes, nose, mouth. A little boy with a large round head pointed at me and said words I couldn’t understand. My instinct broke; everything that had been joined was now in pieces again. I put my face in my hands and cried like an animal.

I came out of the alley to find my way back to Katya. I tried to stop making noise. I couldn’t. I felt people following me. I understood. The current had reversed. As I had chased the boy, they would follow me. They would kill me. I heard myself sobbing. Thomas was dead. I had let him die. They would kill me. It was right.

“Miss? Miss?” A small voice was at my side, gently tugging me without touching me. “Miss? What’s wrong, Miss?”

I looked at the voice. There were two young girls, maybe thirteen years old, at my side. They were dressed in school uniforms. Their faces were soft but intensely focussed in the nose and eyes. I wiped my face; I glanced behind me. There was a small crowd there, made up mostly of teen-age girls and a few boys with curious faces. I turned to look at them. “My husband died,” I said. “He died and somebody stole our wedding rings. Now I don’t have anything.” Tears ran down my face, human tears now. “I have to find my friend and her baby. Thank you.”

The girls nodded gravely. I continued to walk. One girl followed me. “It will be all right,” she said. “God will help you.”

I said, “Thank you, honey.” Machine-gun fire sounded in the distance. The girl dropped away.

“Janice!” It was Katya, rounding a corner, Sonny in her arms. She said, “What happened? Why did you do that?”

“I was robbed. That boy took my wedding rings. I couldn’t catch him.”

“Then we need to call the police.”

If she hadn’t been holding Sonny I would’ve slapped her. “Do you know how stupid you sound?” I said. “ ‘Call the police’?”

“Janice—”

“Look around you!” I was trembling, still dripping tears with no force. “They’re in the middle of a war and you think the police are going to come because of my rings?”

“Janice—”

“Shut up!”

I turned to get away, to go back to the B. and B.

“Stop.” Someone touched my arm from behind; I turned. A very small old man stood before me.

“What?” I asked, or thought.

“Stop,” he said. “Don’t cry. Please. It’s O.K.” He said “please,” but his eyes had an expression of command. I lifted my hand to wipe my eyes. He reached out and took it. He held it palm up; he put my rings in my hand and closed my fingers over them. “O.K.?” he said.

“But how—?”

He shook his head and said, “Just don’t cry. O.K.?”

I stopped crying. He turned to go.

“Wait,” I said. “There was a chain, too?”

He turned his head and looked hard at me.

“The rings were on a chain. Do you know about that?”

He shook his head and walked away.

Years later, I told this story at a party at the university. I told it to a woman who had travelled extensively in Africa. She was a big woman, very grand, with a high chest and a chunky necklace made of precious stones. When I told her how I had lost my rings and how the old man had given them back she made a face. She said, “Really, you make too big a fuss of yourself. You should not go to Africa and then make such a fuss.” I answered her vaguely. I let myself be chastised. Because in that room she was right. In that room I was a privileged and foolish woman running around bawling about rings while a whole city fell apart and people were killed.

But I didn’t meet the old man in that room. I met him in a place of Biblical times and modern times, where people walked back and forth between times, all times. In this place I walked back and forth between the time of the living and the time of the dead. In the middle of my walking, war broke out, and the path between the living and the dead opened up and everything dear to me fell down the crack. I fell, too, and I might have fallen forever—but the old man said, “Stop.” And I stopped.

That same night at the university, another person asked, “Did you thank him?” And I was amazed to realize that I didn’t know. Probably I did not. How could I?

Thanking him would have been like thanking an angel.

I sit in my darkened house sometimes, holding a glass of wine, and I thank him.

The next day, we rode through the streets crouched on the floor of the car that Yonas had borrowed from his uncle. We went to the American Embassy, sharing the car with five Ethiopians, women and girls whom Yonas was taking "to safety." He didn't dare drive his cab lest protesters turn it over and burn it. But there were no taxis in the street, no cars, no people. There were huge high trucks full of soldiers in camouflage with automatic weapons. Still, the Ethiopian women sat on the seat and we crouched on the floor, hiding the whiteness that declared us paying customers. One of the women, a girl really, held Sonny against her breast. A military truck passed close by, bristling with guns. The girl holding our baby looked at me with wide, frightened eyes. Katya pressed her forehead to the sweat-drenched seat and reached up to clasp Sonny's foot as though it were a hand.

Outside, the Embassy was surrounded by guards with machine guns; inside, it was jammed with frightened people and with officials behind windows. We took a number and waited. Waiting next to us was an American doctor who had been on emergency-room duty when gunshot victims began to come in. He was calm, over-calm, but he smelled like fear, and when he got up to one of the windows he began talking loud and fast, telling someone, really everyone, that there had been many killings, many more than the reported twenty-five. The whole room smelled of fear. Something was missing from Sonny's file, and Katya was shouting at someone, her jaw moving like cheap animation on her stark, chalk-white face, her body giving off an odor that was nearly savage, the scent of someone ready to attack. She turned to me suddenly, and I flinched.

"I've got to go," she said. "I'll be back." She was already dialling Yonas on her cell. I went to take Sonny from her, but the child refused; he hadn't let me hold him since I'd handed him off and run down the middle of the street and come back howling in pain. So I just held his hand and walked out to the hall with him. Thomas walked out of the sun-shadowy water, stepping on his elegant pants, damp and sagging, his shoes squishy wet. He smiled as he handed me the dog's chewed-up ball, the dog, standing on its hind legs, dancing. With an ecstatic face, Sonny took the stairs two at a time. He looked up at me, gurgling with pleasure, his forehead shining with effort. I stroked his hair. I thought of his mother's beaten face, her torn ears, her breasts hanging down. The child grabbed my hem with his tiny fist. Katya came back beaming, papers in her hand, her sweat rank and innocent.

That night, I dreamed that Katya and I were in a small, dark house of mud and thatch. Thomas was there, too, asleep on a dirty mat, and so was Sonny's mother, who was terribly sick. Katya kept trying to nurse the mother, to suckle her at her breast, but the woman couldn't hold her head up, and I kept wanting to say, Stop, it's ridiculous, she's the mother. But I was distracted by Thomas's mother in the next room, laughing as she played with Sonny; I was distracted, too, by gunfire, which came closer and closer. . . .

I woke in the dark with my heart pounding; I reached for my wedding rings on the table beside me.

"Katya," I whispered, only half-expecting her to be awake, too.

She replied unintelligibly.

"When Sonny gets older, and he asks you about his mother, what are you going to tell him?"

She didn't answer. Shortly, she began to snore.

But the next day, when we were at the airport, she answered. She said, "If he asks, I'll tell him that his mother was a great woman. That she was a fighter, and because she had to fight so hard she gave me her most precious child to keep him safe. Something like that. Here." Without thinking, she handed me the baby. I stiffened, expecting Sonny to protest. But he didn't; he reached for me and let me hold him. Katya bent to pick up her bag. *I thrive*, his body said to mine. *I will thrive*. I put my hand on the back of his head and held it to my shoulder, my cheek against his hair. It was time to go. ♦

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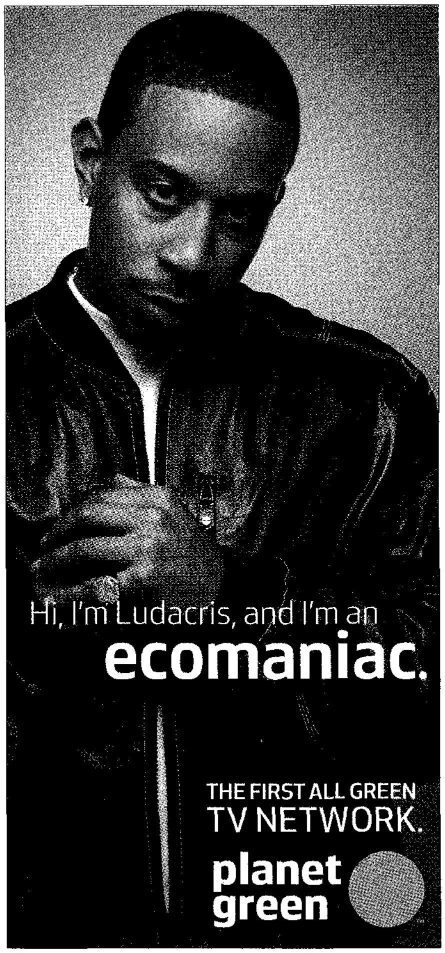
Mary Gaitskill reads a Nabokov short story.



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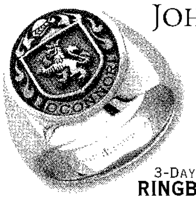

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“Sex and the City.”

BY ANTHONY LANE

Secrecy has clouded “Sex and the City” since it was first announced. When would the film appear? Who would find a husband? Would one of the main characters die? If so, would she commit suicide by self-pity (a constant threat), or would a crocodile escape from the Bronx Zoo and wreak a flesh-ripping revenge for all those handbags? As the release date neared, the paranoia thickened; at the screening I attended, we were asked not only to surrender our cell phones but to march through a beeping security gate, as if boarding a plane to Tel Aviv. There was even a full-body pat-down, by far the biggest turn-on of the night. Not a drop of the forthcoming plot had been leaked in advance, but I took a wild guess. “Apparently,” I said to the woman behind me in line, “some of the girls have problems with their men, break up for a while, and then get back together again.” “Oh, my *God!*” she cried. “How do you *know*?”

What followed was not strictly a movie. It was more like a TV show on steroids. The televised episodes, which ran from 1998 to 2004, lasted for no more than half an hour each. So, spare a thought for the director of the film, Michael Patrick King, who also wrote the screenplay. Faced with the flimsiest of concepts, he had to take it by both ends and pull until he stretched it out to two and a quarter hours. Two and a quarter! When Garbo made “Anna Karenina,” in 1935, she got happy, unhappy, loved, left, and under the train in less than a hundred minutes, so how the hell are her successors supposed to fill the time?

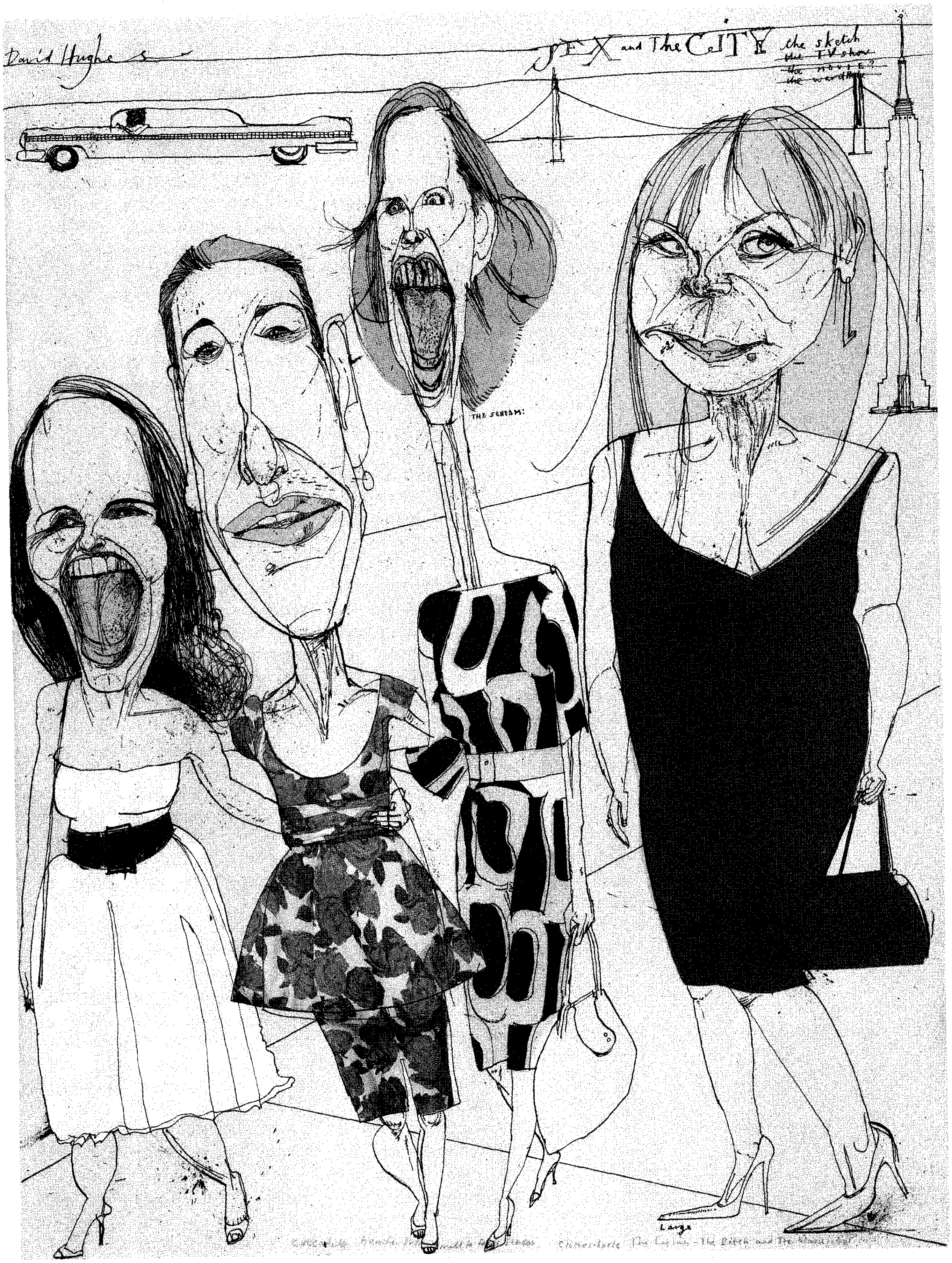
To be fair, there are four of them—banded together, like hormonal hobbits, and all obsessed with a ring. As the story begins, two are married already. First, there is Miranda (Cynthia Nixon), who has a job, a child, and not enough sex with her husband, Steve (David Eigenberg), perhaps because he reminds her of Radar, from “M*A*S*H.” Then comes Charlotte (Kristin Davis), who is blissfully wedded to—well, *what* is she wedded to, exactly? He goes by the name of Harry (Evan Handler), but he’s a ringer for Dr. Evil, from the “Austin Powers” franchise, with all the evil sucked away; what remains is fey and shiny-headed, smiling sweetly about something known only to himself. For a movie about the need for real men—lusty, loyal, and loaded—this unusual earthling is truly a most peculiar advertisement for the gender.

Next, we have Samantha (Kim Cattrall). Everyone has Samantha, or had her at some point; so she would like us to believe, and this is where the film of “Sex and the City” begins to part company with the original. The TV show was smart enough to trade on both the sentimentality and the shockability of its viewers, encouraging them to sigh at romantic satisfaction and, at the same time, to snicker at the dirty talk that gave it spice. Behind it all, one caught a whiff of stale Puritanism: despite the women’s knowing bid for urbanity, there was an old-school, anti-sophisticated wish to put desire in its proper place, or, better still, to disperse it in a shared public giggle, for fear of where it might lead. Now the whiff has become a blast, and Samantha’s efforts to signal her appeal, which might have seemed languorous on the small screen, are blown up here into an embarrassing semaphore: thudding closeups of her slurping through a cocktail straw or swallowing a mouthful of guacamole. No self-respecting maker of soft erotica would countenance such shots, and, as for the matching dialogue (“Something just came up,” Samantha murmurs over the phone, as her boyfriend stands beside her in bulging briefs), it sounds like a flaccid aside from 007. In a daring plot development, she buys a dog the size of a child’s slipper; the camera keeps cutting away to it, and guess what—the pooch screws, too! Mirth is unconfined.

I was never sure how funny the TV series was meant to be. It kept lapsing into a straight face, even a weepy one, as the characters’ contentment came under serious threat. This uncertainty survives into the movie, which made me laugh precisely once, as a magazine editor let fly with a Diane Arbus gag. It is no coincidence that she is played by Candice Bergen, who gets just the one scene, but who is nonetheless the only bona-fide movie star on show. You cannot simply shift a load of television actors onto a movie screen and expect them to command its greater expanse; only one in a thousand will be able to summon that mysterious confluence of presence and reserve on which stardom relies—the will both to offer oneself to the camera and yet to keep back the hidden, unguessable sources of that self. We should not be surprised, therefore, that Kim Cattrall’s come-ons wilt in the transition; but who would have guessed that Sarah Jessica Parker, a nimble performer who *has* had a career in movies, should also seem diminished and ill at ease?

She plays Carrie, the writer whose voice-overs keep us up to speed with the doings of her friends, and with the reckless amassing of what she calls “the

ABOVE: BENOÎT JACQUES; OPPOSITE: DAVID HUGHES


David Hughes
SEX and The CITY
the sketch
~~the TV show~~
~~the movie?~~
~~the wardrobe~~
THE SCREAM:
Large

Superannuated fantasy posing as a slice of modern life: Kristin Davis, Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon, and Kim Cattrall.

two Ls: labels and love." Whether Carrie is able to acknowledge how tightly the two Ls lock together in her mind is another matter. Early in the film, she receives a proposal of marriage from her long-term boyfriend, Mr. Big (Chris Noth), and this triggers a Babylonian orgy of spending. In a montage of wedding-dress fittings, she honors "new friends like Vera Wang and Carolina Herrera and Christian Lacroix, Lanvin and Dior," and so on; what I object to is not the name-dropping—think of it as a chick response to "American Psycho"—but the montage itself, which is shot in lazy veils of schmaltz. Compare the quick-change sequence in "Funny Face," with Audrey Hepburn robed in one Givenchy masterpiece after another, and you sense not merely the greater snap in Stanley Donen's direction (with more than a hand from Richard Avedon), and the hotter bloom of the coloring, but the way in which Hepburn herself outglows the frocks, with her smile and her imperious shout—"Take the picture, take the picture!" No thoroughbred was ever just a clotheshorse.

The women in "Sex and the City," by that standard, are little better than also-rans, and their gallops of conspicuous consumption seem oddly joyless, as displacement activities tend to be. "Because Samantha couldn't get off, she got things," Carrie says. Look at the beam in your own eye, sister. Mr. Big not only buys her a penthouse apartment ("I got it"), he offers to customize the space for her shoes and other fetishes. "I can build you a better closet," he says, as if that were a binding condition of their sexual harmony: if he builds it, she will come. The creepiest aspect of this sequence was the sound that rose from the audience as he displayed the finished closet: gasps, fluttering moans, and, beside me, two women *applauding*. The tactic here is basically pornographic—arouse the viewer with image upon image of what lies just beyond her reach—and the film makes feeble attempts to rein it in. When the wedding hits a bump (look out for Kristin Davis screaming "No! No!" at Chris Noth like a ninth grader auditioning for "The Crucible"), and the bridegroom veers away, our heroine's reaction to the split is typical: "How am I going to get my clothes?" What, honey, even the puffball skirt that you wear to the catwalk show—the one that makes you look like a giant inverted mushroom? That plea gets second prize for the most revealing line in the film, the winner being Miranda's outburst as she hunts for an apartment in a mainly Chinese district: "White guy with a baby! Wherever he's going, that's where we need to be." So that's what drives these people: Aryan real estate.

At least, you could argue, Miranda has a job, as a lawyer. But the film pays it zero attention, and the other women expect her to drop it and fly to Mexico without demur. (And she does.) Worse still is the sneering cut as the scene shifts from Carrie, carefree and childless in the New York Public Library, to the face of Miranda's young son, smeared with spaghetti sauce. In short, to anyone facing the quandaries of being a working mother, the movie sends a vicious memo: Don't be a mother. And don't work. Is this really where we have ended up—with this superannuated fantasy posing as a slice of modern life? On TV, "Sex and the City" was never as insulting as "Desperate Housewives," which strikes me as catastrophically retrograde, but, almost sixty years after "All About Eve," which also featured four major female roles, there is a deep sadness in the sight of Carrie and friends defining themselves not as Bette Davis, Anne Baxter, Celeste Holm, and Thelma Ritter did—by their talents, their hats, and the swordplay of their wits—but purely by their ability to snare and keep a man. Believe me, ladies, we're not worth it. It's true that Samantha finally disposes of one paramour, but only with a view to landing another, and her parting shot is a beauty: "I love you, but I love me more." I have a terrible feeling that "Sex and the City" expects us not to disapprove of that line, or even to laugh at it, but to exclaim in unison, "You *go*, girl." I walked into the theatre hoping for a nice evening and came out as a hard-line Marxist, my head a whirl of closets, delusions, and blunt-clawed cattiness. All the film lacks is a subtitle: "The Lying, the Bitch, and the Wardrobe." ♦

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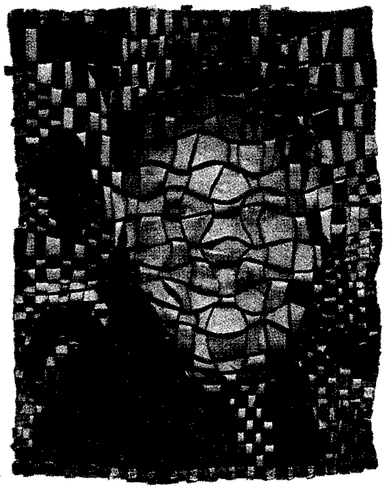

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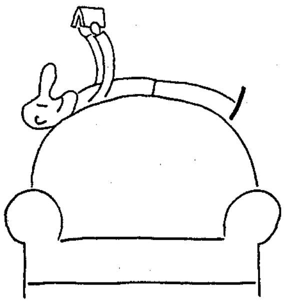
HOUSE OF CAMPARI

BRIEFLY NOTED

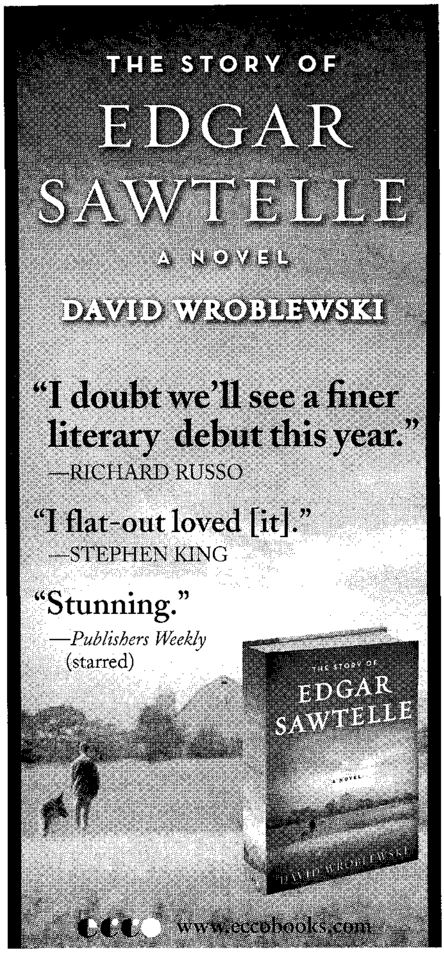
The Book of Getting Even, *by Benjamin Taylor (Steerforth; $23.95).* Gabriel Geismar, the embattled protagonist of Taylor's excellent second novel, is the son of a domineering rabbi growing up in nineteen-fifties New Orleans. Homosexual, suffering from a physical deformity (he has a supernumerary thumb), and enthralled by mathematics—"calculability, sweet detachment from the corporeal universe"—Gabriel has "a furious craving for other, nobler origins." In college, he meets Marghie and Danny Hundert, whose famous physicist father is one of his heroes, and adopts the family as his own. The book explores the tortured and often misguided process by which children attempt to define themselves in relation to their parents (one iteration of the "getting even" of the title), a process from which Danny and Marghie, as Gabriel slowly discovers, are not exempt. Taylor captures their quests for identity in pitch-perfect dialogue and lengthy meditative passages; his elegant plotting feels at once deliberate and improvised.

The Lost Daughter, *by Elena Ferrante, translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein (Europa; $14.95).* In this brutally frank novel of maternal ambivalence, the narrator, a forty-seven-year-old divorcée summering alone on the Ionian coast, becomes obsessed with a beautiful young mother who seems ill at ease with her husband's rowdy, slightly menacing Neapolitan clan. When this woman's daughter loses her doll, the older woman commits a small crime that she can't explain even to herself. Although much of the drama takes place in her head, Ferrante's gift for psychological horror renders it immediate and visceral, as when the narrator recalls the "animal opacity" with which she first longed for a child, before she was devoured by pregnancy.



The Strong Man, *by James Rosen (Doubleday; $35).* After Richard Nixon lost the gubernatorial race in California, in 1962, he moved to New York to practice law and fell in with John Mitchell, a self-assured municipal-bond lawyer, who went on to run Nixon's 1968 Presidential campaign and serve as Attorney General. Mitchell's fame, such as it was, sprang from Watergate; in 1975, he went to prison for his role in the cover-up, and never broke his silence about the affair. Rosen, a correspondent for Fox News, believes that Mitchell's story has not been properly told. He spent years researching his life and his downfall, and arrived at the fascinating—and disputed—theory that the White House counsel John Dean was the mastermind behind the Watergate break-in. Mitchell, with a public image of beady-eyed, pipe-smoking arrogance, was never a lovable figure, but he was in many ways a sad one. Particularly wrenching for him was the fate of his wife, Martha, who was regarded as a somewhat comical figure—a Southern Gracie Allen for the Nixon era—even as she was falling apart.

Palestinian Walks, *by Raja Shehadeh (Scribner; $15).* A work of passionate polemic, journeying, history, and autobiography, this highly original consideration of the Palestinian-Israeli issue is structured around a series of vigorous, attentive hikes through the occupied territories. Shehadeh, a lawyer and human-rights activist who lives in the West Bank city of Ramallah, gives the reader, accustomed to the point-counterpoint of daily journalism, a personal sense of one man's attachment to his land and of a people's feelings of loss and uncertainty as more settlements are constructed and reconciliation drifts farther from view. Shehadeh is firm in his views of Israeli policy, but he is also an open soul, and his final walk in the book is with an Israeli—a moving encounter in a volume that, in the Palestinian literature of hope and fortitude, ranks with Sari Nusseibeh's memoir, "Once Upon a Country."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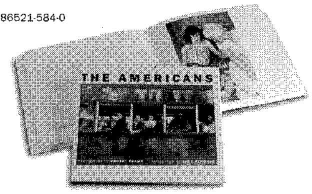

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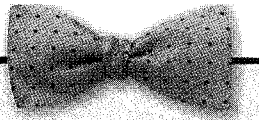

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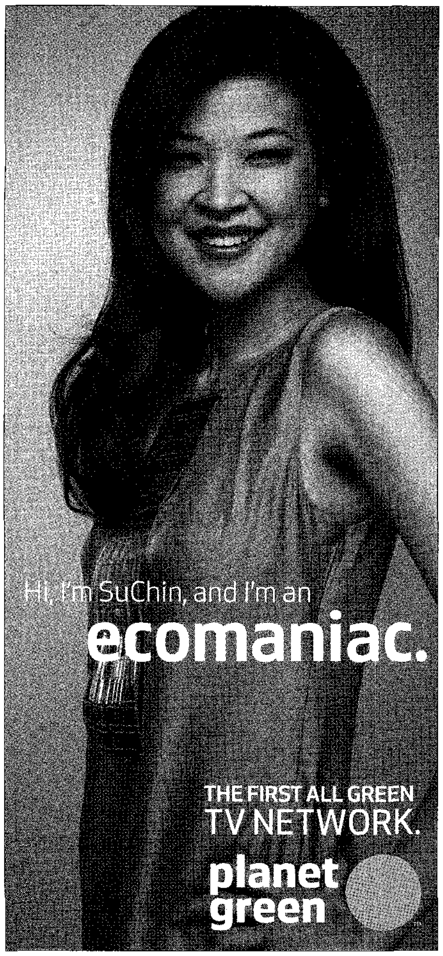
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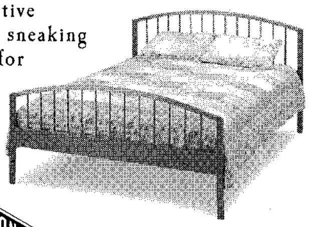
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BOOKS

HOLIDAY IN HELLMOUTH

God may be dead, but the question of why he permits suffering lives on.

BY JAMES WOOD

Nietzsche said that if a human being put his ear to the heart chamber of the world and heard the roar of existence, the "innumerable shouts of pleasure and woe," he would surely break into pieces. But a newspaper, pumping its inky current of despair, might serve as well. On a single day, Thursday, May 15th, the *Times* contained the following. The lead article was about the earthquake in China, now estimated to have killed more than fifty thousand people. It was titled "Tiny Bodies in a Morgue, and Unspeakable Grief in China," and was accompanied by a photograph of two parents sitting next to their dead child. A story about the recent cyclone in Myanmar estimated the number of deaths at anywhere between 68,833 and 127,990. The journalist mentioned a man named Zaw Ayea, twenty-seven, who found his sister's body; his mother and two younger brothers are missing. He cannot speak: "He stares straight ahead with a strangely placid expression on his face. His friends say he has been in shock since the cyclone."

And the minor stories, on this day? At least ten people killed in a bomb attack west of Baghdad, in Abu Ghraib; a policeman killed in a bomb attack in northern Spain (probably ETA terrorists); a possible missile strike on a Pakistani border village that killed about a dozen people (this may well have been the work of an American drone); and a piece about a radical Islamic cleric, resident in Italy but "transferred," perhaps thanks to American help, by the process of "extraordinary rendition," to a jail in Egypt, where he was allegedly tortured. His wife told an Italian court, "He was tied up like he was being crucified. He was beat up, especially around his ears. He was subjected to electroshocks to many body parts."

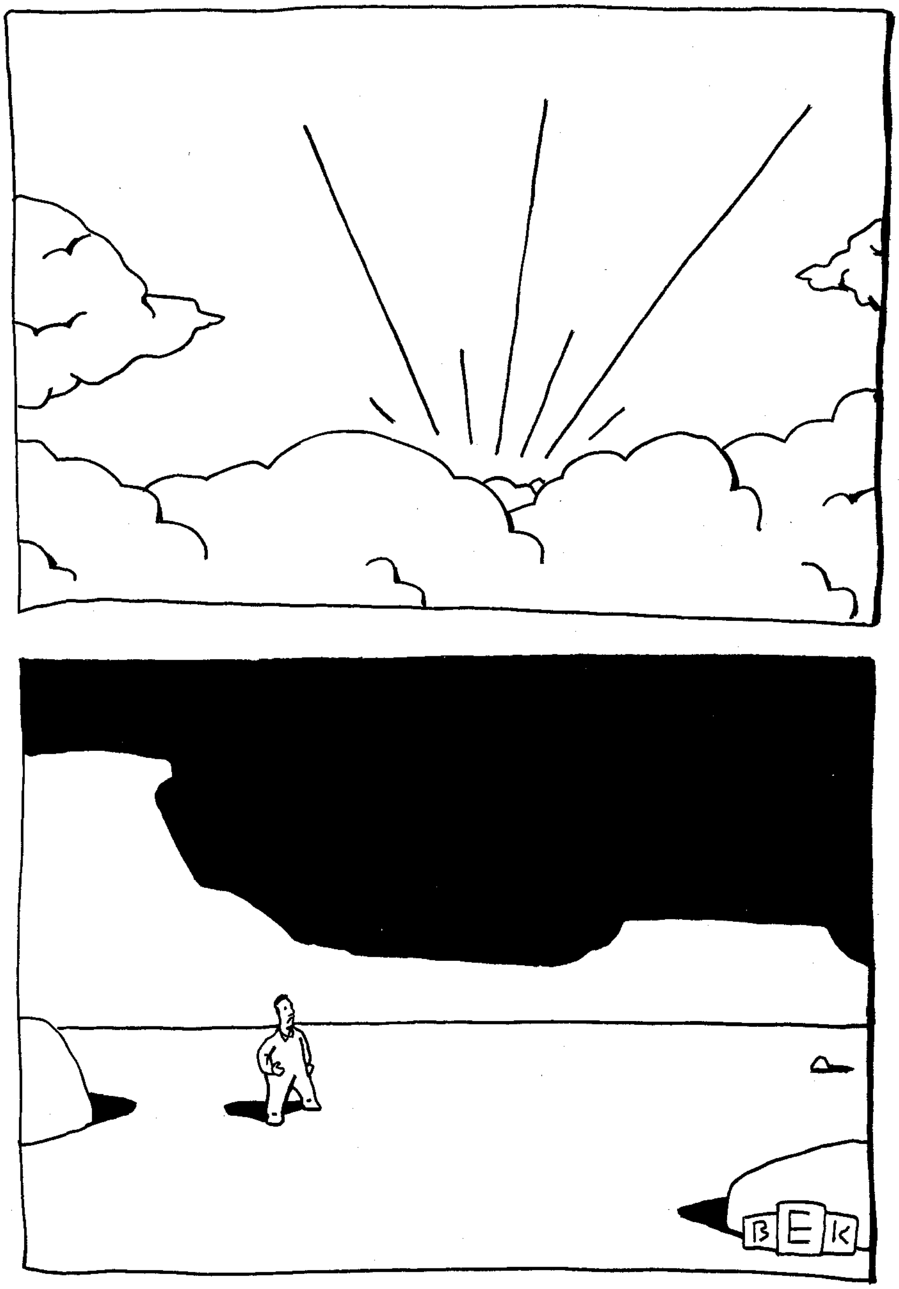
A large proportion of life involves our refusing to put our ear to the mundane heart chamber, lest we die from hearing "the roar which lies on the other side of silence." It is considered almost gauche to wave the flag of general suffering in other people's faces, as Dostoyevsky does repeatedly in his novels, most famously in "The Brothers Karamazov," when the rebellious Ivan confronts his pious brother Alyosha with a list of degradations, some of which Dostoyevsky had got from real accounts—Turkish soldiers tossing babies on their bayonets in front of the mothers, parents punishing their five-year-old girl for wetting her bed by locking her all night in a freezing outhouse and smearing her face with excrement.

For the lucky few, there is reason to hope that life will be a business of evenly rationed suffering: stern parents perhaps, a few humiliations at school, then a love affair or two gone wrong, maybe a marriage broken. Our parents will die, and farther off, ideally deferred, will come our own steady demise. Plenty of suffering for a life, certainly, but most of us subsist on the plausible expectation that fortune will draw a circle around that personal portion, and that the truly unbearable—murder, rape, dead children, torture, war—will remain outside the cordon. Norman Rush, in his novel "Mortals," calls this "hellmouth": "the opening up of the mouth of hell right in front of you, without warning, through no fault of your own." Without warning, and yet always feared. Job, whom God places into hellmouth to test him, knew that paradox: "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me."

Theologians and philosophers talk about "the problem of evil," and the hygienic phrase itself bespeaks a certain distance from extreme suffering, the view from a life inside the charmed circle. They mean the classic difficulty of how we justify the existence of suffering and iniquity with belief in a God who created us, who loves us, and who providentially manages the world. The term for this justification is "theodicy," which nowadays seems a very old-fashioned exercise in turning around and around the stripped screw of theological scholastics. Still, if polls are correct, about eighty per cent of Americans ought to be engaged in such antiquarianism. Union University, in Jackson, Tennessee, might profit from intense classes in theodicy. "God protected this campus," one of the students there said, because no one was killed in the tornadoes that devastated parts of Tennessee on February 5th. Since ordinary Tennesseans were killed elsewhere that night, the logic of such shamanism is that God either did not or could not protect those unfortunates from something that the state's governor once likened to "the wrath of God."

Antique and abstract it may be, but thinking about theodicy still has the power to change lives. I know this, because it was how I began to separate myself from the somewhat austere Christian environment I grew up in. I remember the day, in my late teens, when I drew a line down the middle of a piece of paper, on one side of which I wrote my reasons for belief in God, on the other my reasons against. I can't remember the order of my negatives now, but the inefficacy of prayer was likely at the top. Here was a demonstrable case of promises made (if you have faith, you can move a mountain) but not kept (the mountain not only stays put but suddenly erupts and consumes a few villages). During my teens, two members of my parents' congregation died of cancer, despite all the prayers offered up on their behalf. When I looked at the congregants kneeling on cushions, their heads bent to touch the wooden pews, it seemed to me as if they were literally butting their heads against a palpable impossibility. And this was years before I discovered Samuel Butler's image for the inutility of prayer in his novel "The Way of All Flesh"—the bee that has strayed into a drawing room and is buzzing against the wallpaper, trying to extract nectar from one of the painted roses.

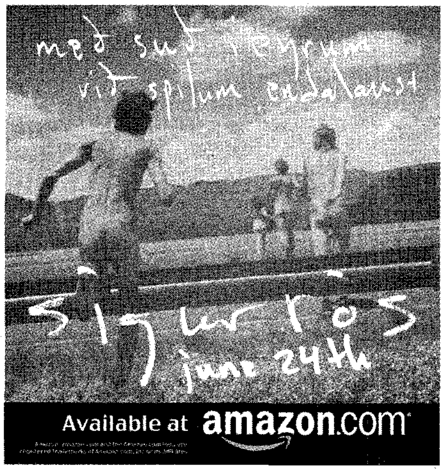
Theodicy, or, rather, its failure, was the other major entry on my debit side. I was trapped within the age-old conundrum: the world is full of pain and wickedness; God may be jealous but is also merciful and all-loving (how much more so, if one believes that Christ incarnated him). If he has the power to alleviate this suffering but does not, he is cruel; if he cannot, he is weak. I wasn't consoled by the standard responses. Suffering is a mystery, I was told, as is God's absence in the face of suffering. But this was what I was also told when prayers failed to make their mark: the old "incomprehensibility" routine. It seemed to me that the Gospels, central to my family life, made some fairly specific promises and laid on us some fairly specific obligations; yet that specificity could simply go on holiday whenever God himself seemed to have gone on holiday. ("God moves in mysterious ways.")



Christianity needs the concept of heaven simply to make sense of human suffering.

BRUCE ERIC KAPLAN

God "suffers with us," I was told; he feels our pain. If Christ was God incarnate, then God suffered on the Cross. He walks with us in our suffering. This has been the great twentieth-century addition to the familiar arguments, which is perhaps unsurprising, amid so much carnage. The Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Zizek argues, in his book "On Belief," that when God abandoned Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane he abandoned himself. Christianity, he asserts, returns at this moment to the story of Job, the man abandoned by God: "It is Christ (God) himself who has to occupy the place of Job. . . . Man's existence is living proof of God's self-limitation." A God whose



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power has been so drastically limited, and who sounds so like us in our abjection, might be loved, but why should he be worshipped? Twenty-five years ago, as I hunched over my piece of paper with its vertical line, I decided that if God existed, which I strongly doubted, then this entity was neither describable nor cherishable but was a vaporous, quite possibly malign force at the horizon of the sayable.

Another attempted consolation is that God intended us to have free will, and free will requires the liberty to do bad as well as good. If we were unable to err, our relation to God would be robotic, meaningless in its hapless obedience. It is regrettable that Hitlers are allowed to exist; but universal freedom is a higher good than the release from local pain. This is still the best available response to the theodicy problem. But even at sixteen I could see an enormous, iridescent flaw in this colorless argument: it is that the Bible is full of divine intervention, full of infringements of free will. God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and brings plagues, and spares the firstborn of the Israelites (while conveniently murdering the Egyptians'), and, if you accept the New Testament, anoints his son as a sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world. We pray to him precisely because we believe in the power of such intervention. But when we actually need his intervention—say, to put a stop to a few concentration camps—he has . . . gone on holiday again, leaving people to drone on about the paramount importance of unmolested "free will."

They were at it again when the tsunami killed hundreds of thousands in 2004. The Archbishop of Canterbury, a distinguished theologian, wrote an article at the time, reminding his Anglican communion that such tragedies challenge faith. But then he circled around a kind of physicist's version of the free-will argument when he cautioned that "the world has to have a regular order and pattern of its own. . . . So there is something odd about expecting that God will constantly step in if things are getting dangerous." Well, there would be something odd if you had never read the Bible. But one of the repeated indices of God's power, as invoked in many of the Psalms, is his ability to control the waves—after all, the Psalmist knew that a great flood had consumed the world, at God's command, and that the Red Sea had been divinely parted. How dangerous would things have to get before divine intervention was justified? To this, the Gospels can reply succinctly: not very. For when the disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee, and things took a stormy turn, Jesus appeared, walked on water, and calmed the storm. Perhaps the disciples just meant more to Jesus than a few hundred thousand Asians.

There is something adolescent about such complaint; I can hear it like a boy's breaking voice in my own prose. For anti-theodicy is permanent rebellion. It is not quite atheism but wounded theism, condemned to argue ceaselessly against a God it is supposed not to believe in. Bart D. Ehrman's new book, "God's Problem" (HarperOne; $25.95), is highly adolescent in tone. Its jabbing subtitle, "How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer," sounds as if it should be furiously triple-underlined on the dust jacket. Ehrman has been the favorite academic of the new wave of atheism since his book "Misquoting Jesus" (2005) became an unlikely best-seller. He is a professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina, and is obviously a fine teacher, because his books are naturally pedagogic. "Misquoting Jesus" is a lucid, painstaking introduction to the unreliability of the Bible as a text, especially the New Testament. It summarizes the scholarly consensus on passages like Jesus' defense of the adulteress, when Christ asked those without sin to cast the first stone at her. Ehrman argues, along with most recent scholars, that this story is almost certainly not original to John's Gospel but "probably a well-known story circulating in the oral tradition about Jesus, which at some point was added in the margin of a manuscript." It is not found in the oldest manuscripts of John, and is written in a different style from the rest of the Gospel.

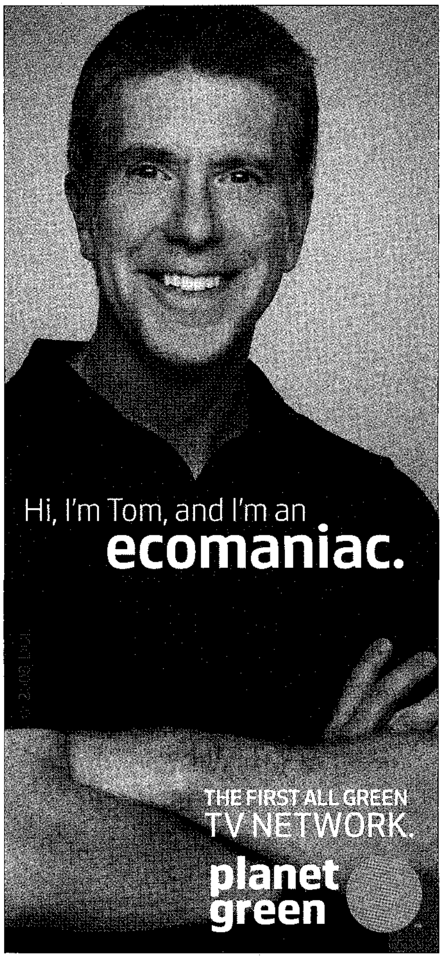
What warmed up Ehrman's reputation on the New Atheists' circuit, though, was probably not so much his diligent textual labors as what he revealed in the book's introduction. Readers learned that he had been reared in a conservative family in Kansas, was "born again" in high school, attended the fundamentalist Moody Bible Institute, in Chicago, and then Wheaton College, Billy Graham's alma mater. When he was at Princeton Theological Seminary, prolonged reflection on the textual status of the Gospels began to weaken his religious certitude. But, in coyly declaring that the book was "the end result of a long journey," he left readers to reach their own conclusions about his ultimate destination. In his new work, there is no such reticence. "I no longer go to church, no longer believe, no longer consider myself a Christian," he announces on the third page. "The subject of this book is the reason why." In a nutshell: "I could no longer explain how there can be a good and all-powerful God actively involved with this world, given the state of things. . . . The problem of suffering became for me the problem of faith."

If he no longer believes, of course, suffering should not be a theological "problem." But the rebel is stuck, as Dostoyevsky knew well, in an aggrieved nostalgia for belief. For the believer, theodicy is merely "the problem of evil"; for the rebel, theodicy is also "the problem of theodicy," and protest, even rage, is the loudest tone. Throughout the book, Ehrman recounts gigantic tragedies—the influenza epidemic of 1918, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the five people who die of malaria every minute—and then bawls in horror and hatred: "How could God allow it to happen? . . . How could God allow this to happen to anyone, let alone his 'chosen people'?" Later: "It is hard to believe that God inflicts people with cancer, flu, or AIDS in order to make sure they praise him to the end. Praise him for what? Mutilation and torture? For his great power to inflict pain and misery on innocent people? . . . What kind of God is this?"

This full-throated anger is very far from the sterile laboratories of the professional theodicists, where white-coated philosophers quite often crush suffering down to the logician's granules of P and Q. ("Let P be the proposition that God is benevolent, and let Q be the existence of what Levinas calls useless suffering.") But this entrapped invocation of a God who is not believed in but is nonetheless despised is what gives the book a rough power. Ehrman rightly dislikes the philosophers of theodicy, calling their work obtuse and disconnected from life, but he also, in a revealing moment, distinguishes himself from "recent agnostic or atheist authors." Unlike them, he says, "I do not think that every reasonable and reasonably intelligent person will in the end come to see things my way when it comes to the important issues in life." He is too polite to say it, but one of the weaknesses of otherwise useful atheists like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris is that, lacking nostalgia for lost belief, they also lack the power to imagine why anyone would ever have professed it.

Awash in negative belief, Ehrman unabashedly fights his God, and wants to discover what the Bible has to say about suffering. He is a lucid expositor, the weaknesses of his book being the aural clatter of the lecture room ("Still, most Jews didn't buy it, and this was a major source of pain to Paul") and its limited perspective. He seldom connects Biblical passages with the larger philosophical or literary traditions. You will find no Pierre Bayle or Rousseau or Schopenhauer here, and no Milton, or Hardy, or Camus. The early Church Fathers are hardly mentioned. There is almost a sense that Ehrman, fearing scholasticism, does not want to get sucked into the philosophical history of theodicy. It is also true that, as Ehrman says, theodicy as such does not exist in the Bible. Nowadays, theodicy always has a wary eye on the theological exit: this makes no sense, therefore I will have to reject the idea of God. But there was no such exit before about 1700, at the very earliest. "Ancient Jews and Christians never questioned whether God existed," Ehrman notes. "What they wanted to know was how to understand God and how to relate to him, given the state of the world."

So Ehrman concentrates on what you could call the first responders to hellmouth—the Prophets, the Psalmists, the Apocalypticists—and he is often illuminating. He separates three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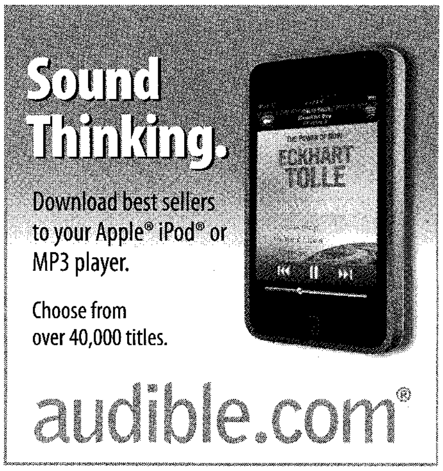
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large strands in the Biblical writings: the idea that suffering is a punishment for sinful behavior; the idea that suffering is either ultimately redemptive or some kind of test of virtue; and the idea that God will finally vanquish evil and establish his kingdom of peace and harmony. We are probably most familiar with suffering as punishment, since it runs throughout the Hebrew Bible. Creation almost begins with a curse, God's determination that women will give birth in pain as a result of Eve's disobedience. The earth is then quickly condemned to the Flood, because God is unhappy with his sinful creation, and wants to start over again—what the English comedian Eddie Izzard calls the Etch A Sketch approach. (Izzard, whose standup routines often circle around religion, is very funny, also, about the unjust deaths of all those animals. What would constitute, say, a *wicked giraffe*? "I will eat all the leaves on this tree. I will eat more leaves than I should and then other giraffes may die.") The Israelites, of course, are alternately rescued and abandoned by their jealous God, depending on the quality of their disobedience. And the Prophets majestically harp on punishment as a consequence of sinfulness—the oppression of the poor, sexual deviance (Amos), worship of false gods and idols (Hosea). Military defeat, captivity, and exile are the retributions for this alleged errancy.

This strain may be the least fashionable of all Biblical responses to suffering, except among evangelicals like Pat Robertson, who seemed perfectly happy to ascribe Ariel Sharon's stroke to his surrender of Gaza to the Palestinians. But it widely persists in a slightly transferred form, as Ehrman points out. Judaism was a religion of sacrifice, in which the proffered gifts were seen as an atonement for sin. Punishment is bought off, effectively, by the garnishing of one's wages. "Because sin brings horrible judgment in the manifestation of God's wrath, this wrath needs to be averted," Ehrman writes. "It is averted by the proper sacrifice of an animal." It is not entirely clear how this atonement worked. "Whatever the answer to the question of mechanics, the Israelite temple cult was focused on sacrifice as a way of restoring a lost relationship with God, broken by disobedience." Eventually, this religion of atonement would offer the very largest sacrificial lamb, God's own son, as a scapegoat for the sins of the world. As Ehrman puts it, "a relatively simple formula" undergirds Paul's salvationism: "sin leads to punishment; Christ took the punishment upon himself; therefore, Christ's death can atone for the sins of others." Ehrman might have added that Kierkegaard has it right when, in "The Sickness Unto Death," he gloomily writes that Christianity "begins with the doctrine of sin."

The second major Biblical response is the notion of suffering as a test or something otherwise improving. Ehrman mentions that when Joseph, after

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From left to right: Darren Moore, Angela Lindvall, Adrian Grenier, Boise Thomas, Tom Bergeron, Maria Menounos, Steve Thomas, Bob Woodruff, Holter Graham, Annabelle Gurwitch, Bill Nye, Jodi Murphy, Daniel Sieberg, Emeril Lagasse, SuChin Pak, Tommy Lee and Chris 'Ludacris' Bridges.

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his travails in Egypt, finally is confronted by his traitorous brothers he rather piously tells them, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today." Abraham was tested by God when he was commanded to kill his son Isaac, and Job, after a period of affliction and loss, was restored to health and prosperity as a reward for his righteousness. Isaiah speaks of "the servant of the Lord," whose suffering will heal the nation of Israel. Once again, it is Christianity that greedily fattens itself on the scattered suggestions of the Hebrew Bible, reading Isaiah's suffering servant as nothing less than the suffering Messiah, and turning Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac into a harbinger of God's completed sacrifice of Jesus. (The libretto for Handel's Messiah may represent the purest form of this Christian overreading.) For Paul, in Romans 5:3-4, "Tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope."

It is now widespread, this rather repellent idea that suffering is dimly watermarked by redemption; that behind our pain lies His plan. (Most monstrously, a televangelist named John C. Hagee has argued that the Holocaust was God's way of achieving the greater good of allowing the Jews to reclaim Israel.) The believer talks about providence; the secularist about how clouds have silver linings. The dazed survivor of an accident tells the TV crews that he thinks God has something special in mind for him. Newspapers run pieces about how estranged relatives were at last brought together by tragedy. Simone Weil, in her essay on affliction, says that pain is like the moment when an apprentice hurts himself for the first time on the job; at such moments workers say, "It is the trade entering his body." Affliction, she implies, similarly trains us. If so, it also kills us, as it killed her. And, theologically, one has to remember that all this apparently useful suffering is supposedly taking place under God's watch. In the seventeenth century, Pierre Bayle likened this godly surveillance to a father who lets his son break his leg just so that he can show off his skill by mending it. Ehrman is bluntly commonsensical: "The reality is that most suffering is not positive, does not have a silver lining, is not good for the body or soul, and leads to wretched and miserable, not positive, outcomes."

In the Biblical world, God did not simply gaze—our modern diminishment of him—but also acted. Ehrman's third category of response to suffering concerns the apocalyptic and messianic certainty that God was involved in an epic battle with evil which he would eventually win, allowing the final establishment of his Kingdom. Deftly summarizing the current scholarly conclusions, Ehrman sees the apocalyptic strain in Biblical Judaism (as in, say, the Book of Daniel) as a

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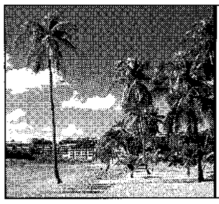

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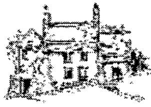

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response to different foreign oppressions in the second century B.C.E., and again in the first century B.C.E. The greatest Jewish apocalyptic, Jesus, seems to have believed in the imminent arrival of God's Kingdom—not up in Heaven but here on earth. Ehrman remarks that the inversions of the beatitudes (the poor shall inherit the earth, and so on) make sense because it is the poor and the lowly who will be rewarded in this approaching utopia. Paul, too, believed in this fearful imminence, though one notes that already, less than a hundred years after Jesus' death, this Kingdom is half-etherealized: for Paul, it is above, not here on earth. Eternal life is now in Heaven, secure for those who have faith in Christ.

Heaven, one of the tenderest verses in the Bible has it, is where God will wipe away all tears from our faces. In her novel "Gilead," Marilynne Robinson adds, in a line just as tender, if a little sterner, "It takes nothing from the loveliness of the verse to say that is exactly what will be required." Robinson, herself a devout Protestant, means that the immense surge of human suffering in the world will need, and deserves, a great deal of heavenly love and repair; it is as close as her novel comes to righteous complaint. But one could also say, more skeptically, that Christianity needs the concept of Heaven simply to make sense of all the world's suffering—that, theologically speaking, Heaven is "exactly what will be required." In the end, Heaven, it seems, is the only tenable response to the problem of evil. It is where God's mysterious plan will be revealed; it is where the poor and the downtrodden, the sick and the tortured, will be healed; it is where everything that we went through on earth will suddenly seem "worth it."

But Heaven is also a problem for theodicists who take the freedom to choose between good and evil as paramount. For Heaven must be a place where either our freedom to sin has been abolished or we have been so transfigured that we no longer want to sin: in Heaven, our will miraculously coincides with God's will. And here the free-will defense unravels, and is unravelled by the very idea of Heaven. If Heaven obviates the great human freedom to sin, why was it ever such a momentous ideal on earth, "worth" all that pain and suffering?

The difficulty can be recast in terms of the continuity of the self. If we will be so differently constituted in Heaven as to be strangers to sin, then no meaningful connection will exist between the person who suffers here and the exalted soul who will enjoy the great system of rewards and promises and tears wiped from faces: our faces there will not be the faces we have here. And, if there were to be real continuity between our earthly selves and our heavenly ones, then Heaven might dangerously begin to resemble earth. This idea haunted Dostoyevsky, who wrote a chilling fable about it called "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," in which the protagonist, on the verge of suicide, has a dream in which he has died and ended up on a pristine Greek island, a heavenly utopia where there is no sin. Then this man tells his first lie, and eventually utopia is corrupted: Heaven is just Eden all over again, and man is busy wrecking it.

"Come quickly, Lord" is the great refrain of both the Old Testament and the New. But the problem for Jews is that the Messiah never came, and everything stayed the same (or got worse), while the problem for Christians is that the Messiah did come, and everything stayed the same (or got worse). Jews and Christians are dependent, in different ways, on an always deferred Second Coming. Heaven—because it comes next and is not now—is, as so often in religious thought, a solution that merely creates another problem. If God supposedly wipes away all tears from our faces in Heaven, why does he not do it now? Why does God not now establish paradise on earth, as the Jehovah's Witnesses believe he will do? And what is the purpose of these eighty or so years we spend on earth not having the tears wiped from our faces? ♦

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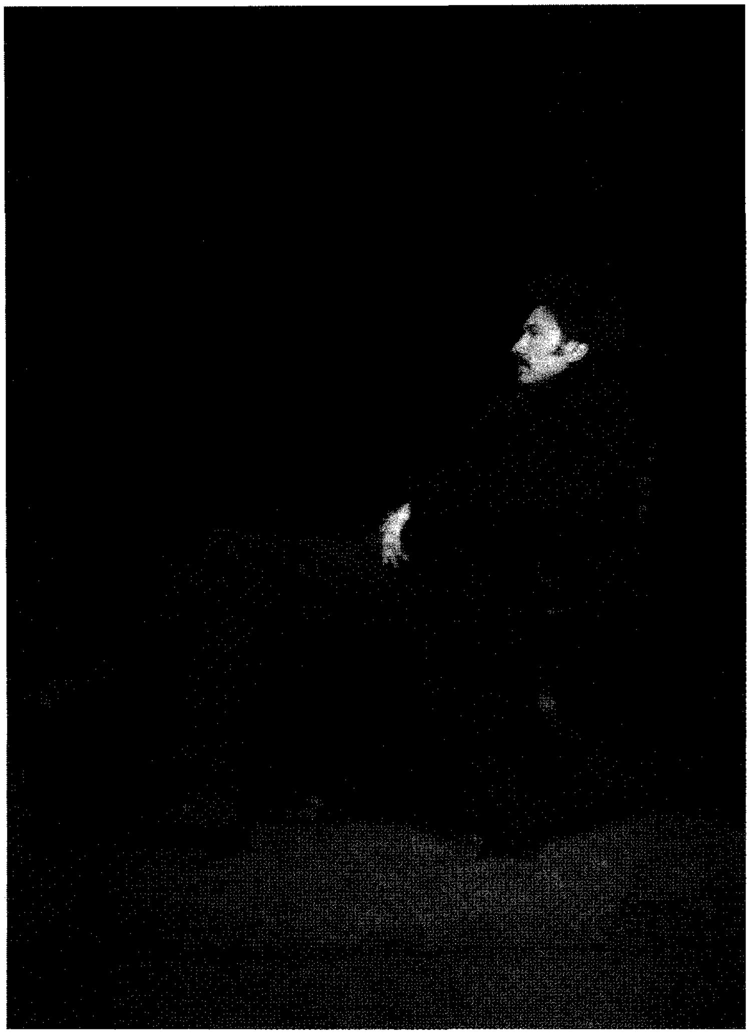
Those responsible should feel the pain, and that means jail time. It means more regulation, because the fix is always in without sunshine. It has to be a level playing field, because if the house never loses we're all just suckers.

BOOKS

THE POUND ERROR

The elusive master of allusion.

BY LOUIS MENAND



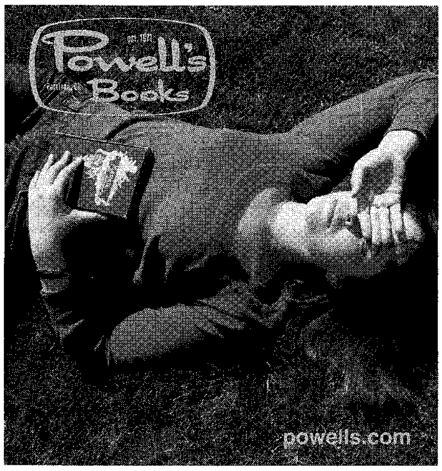
Ezra Pound in London, in 1918. T. S. Eliot called him "the better craftsman."

HARRY RANSOM CENTER/UT-AUSTIN

Ezra Pound turns up five times in Peter Gay's big survey of the modern movement in literature and the arts, "Modernism: The Lure of Heresy"—once in connection with T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (which Pound edited), once as the author of an anti-Semitic sentiment (one of many), and three times as the originator of the slogan "Make It New" (which suits the theme of Gay's account). Pound's poetry and criticism are not discussed; no reader of Gay's book would have any idea of what his importance or influence as a writer might be. Gay's is a commodious volume with a long reach, "From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond"; still, a handful of passing references seems a sharp decline in market value for a writer who was once the hero of a book called "The Pound Era."

Pound's aspirations for literature were grand. He believed that bad writing destroyed civilizations and that good writing could save them, and although he was an élitist about what counted as art and who mattered as an artist, he thought that literature could enhance the appreciation of life for everyone. He was vain and idiosyncratic, but he had no wish to be a prima donna. No doubt Eliot, James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Ernest Hemingway, Ford Madox Ford, and Marianne Moore would have produced interesting and innovative work whether they had known Pound or not, but Pound's attention and interventions helped their writing and sped their careers. He edited them, reviewed them, got them published in magazines he was associated with, and included them in anthologies he compiled; he introduced them to editors, to publishers, and to patrons; he gave them the benefit of his time, his learning, his money, and his old clothes. "A miracle of ebulliency, gusto, and help," Joyce called him. It's true that he was flamboyant, immodest, opinionated, tactless, a pinwheel of affectation; he made people crazy and he became crazy himself. Gertrude Stein's description of him is frequently invoked: "A village explainer, excellent if you were a village, but if you were not, not." In his devotion to the modernist avant-garde, though, he was selfless. "A bombastic galleon, palpably bound to, or from, the Spanish Main," Wyndham Lewis wrote about meeting Pound. "Going on board, I discovered beneath its skull and crossbones, intertwined with *fleurs de lys* and spattered with preposterous starspangled oddities, a heart of gold."

Pound's own work, on the other hand, has had a difficult reception. The "It" in "Make It New" is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past. A great deal of Pound's poetry therefore takes the form of translation, imitation, allusion, and quotation. He is trying to breathe life into a line of artistic and intellectual accomplishment, but it is a line of his own invention—a "tradition" that includes, among others, John Adams, Confucius, Flaubert, the Provençal troubadours, and Benito Mussolini. Not, prima facie, a canon. This means that to understand what Pound is doing you often need to have read the same writers, studied the same languages, and learned the same history that Pound read, studied, and learned (or rely on the commentary of a person who has). This is especially the case with the work on which he spent fifty-four years and staked his reputation, "The Cantos of Ezra



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Pound"—"a cryselephantine poem of immeasurable length," as he once described it. So it is very easy for the average underprepared reader to get Pound wrong, and he desperately did not want to be misunderstood. Opacity and ambiguity can be deliberate effects in modernist writing: sometimes the text goes dark, reference becomes uncertain, language aspires to the condition of music. In Pound's case, though, any obscurity is unintentional. Clarity is the essence of his aesthetic. He sometimes had to struggle against his own technique to achieve it.

There is another problem with Pound, which is that he was a Fascist. The term gets abused freely in discussions of modernist writers, a number of whom were reactionaries—Gay calls these "the anti-modern modernists"—and some of whom were anti-Semites, but very few of whom were actually Fascists. Pound is one of the very few. His obsession with the Jews (there are some anti-Semitic passages in his early prose, but nothing systematic) dates from his interest in the views of the founder of the Social Credit movement, Major C. H. Douglas, around 1920. (Social Credit was an economic reform movement aimed at the elimination of debt—hence Pound's attacks on usury and on Jews as moneylenders and financiers of wars, a classic type of anti-Semitism.) Pound's infatuation with Mussolini dates from a concert given by Olga Rudge, a violinist who was Pound's longtime mistress, at Mussolini's home, in 1927, where he came up with the idea of enlisting Mussolini as a patron of the avant-garde. Six years later, Pound had a private audience with Il Duce, at the Palazzo Venezia, in Rome, and presented him with a copy of "A Draft of XXX Cantos," which Mussolini graciously acknowledged with the remark "*Ma questo è divertente*" ("How amusing"). Pound concluded that Mussolini had an intuitive grasp of the significance of his poetry.

In 1941, Pound began delivering broadcasts from the Rome studios of Ente Italiana Audizione Radio, attacking the Jews, Roosevelt, and American intervention in the war. The broadcasts continued through the Allied invasion of Italy, in 1943. In 1944, he wrote two propagandistic cantos—which are known as the Italian Cantos, and which were for many years omitted from the New Directions edition of the complete "Cantos"—praising the Fascist fighting spirit. In 1945, he surrendered to American officials on a charge of treason and was imprisoned in an Army Disciplinary Training Center north of Pisa. He was brought to the United States, but, thanks to the intercession of friends and of Dr. Winfred Overholser, the superintendent of St. Elizabeths Hospital, in Washington, D.C., he was spared a trial, on psychiatric grounds (although he never received a specific diagnosis). He spent twelve years in St. Elizabeths, where he acquired a number of disciples, including John Kasper, a segregationist associated with the neo-Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell. In 1958, the indictment was dismissed and Pound returned to Italy. When he walked off the boat, in Naples, he gave the Fascist salute.

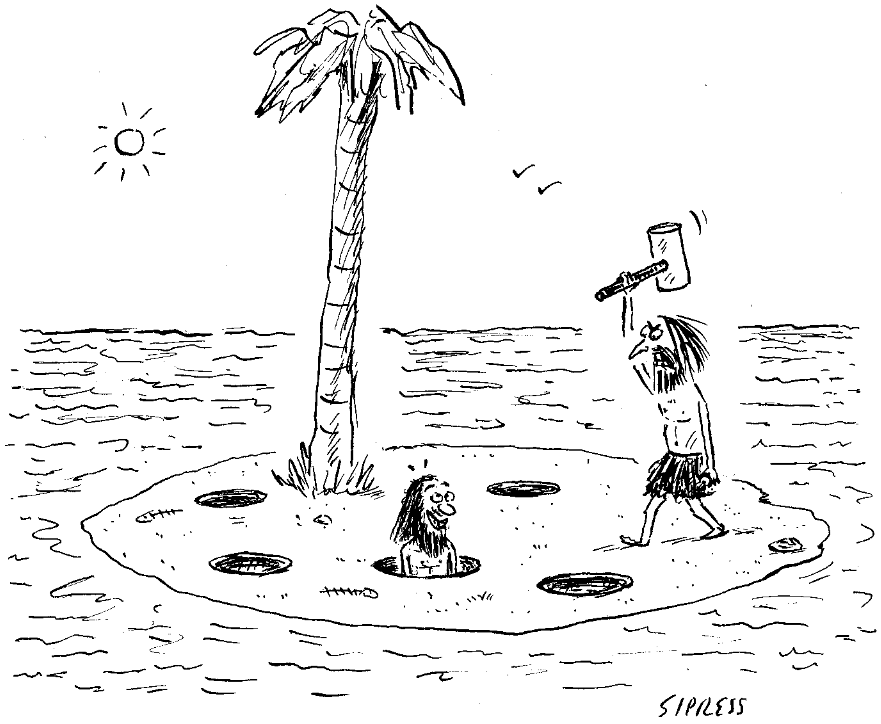
Pound's politics are not incidental to his achievement. Italian Fascism is integral to "The Cantos," and the section called "The Pisan Cantos," which Pound composed in the Army Disciplinary Training Center, at a time when he had every expectation of being executed, is, formally, an elegy occasioned by the death of Mussolini at the hands of Italian partisans ("Ben and la Clara *a Milano* / by the heels at Milano"). Like most classical elegies, it is as much about the poet as about the departed; it is suffused with memories, and spiked with anger at the indifference of the world. It won the Bollingen Prize for Poetry in 1949, and although the award was (and remains) controversial, "The Pisan Cantos" is the finest thing that Pound ever wrote. It's the one place in his work where his learning is fused with genuine personal feeling.

Parts of "The Pisan Cantos" have been read as a recantation:

"Master thyself, then others shall thee
 beare"

  Pull down thy vanity
Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail,
A swollen magpie in a fitful sun,
Half black half white
Nor knowst'ou wing from tail
Pull down thy vanity
  How mean thy hates
Fostered in falsity,
  Pull down thy vanity,
Rathe to destroy, niggard in charity,
Pull down thy vanity,
  I say pull down.

This may sound repentant, but it is not the poet speaking to himself in the



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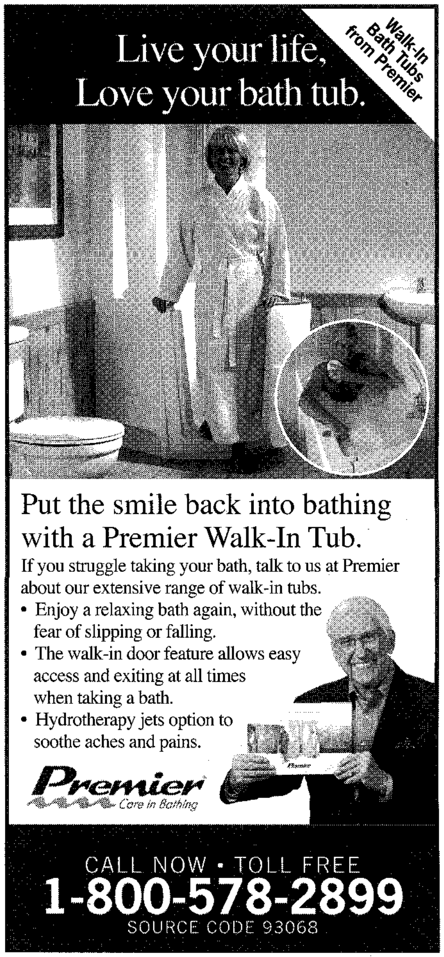
second person. The lines are addressed to the American Army ("Half black half white"): the prisoner is raging against his captors. Pound laments, but he does not regret. "The Pisan Cantos" is a Fascist poem without apologies.

A. David Moody does not deal with the political side of the Pound problem in the first volume of his biography, "Ezra Pound Poet: A Portrait of the Man and His Work" (Oxford; $47.95), because he takes us only to 1921, the year Pound left London, first for Paris and then for Rapallo, where he lived until he surrendered to the Americans. Pound was born in 1885, in Hailey, Idaho, a fact useful to English satirists, whose ridicule Pound abetted by occasionally speaking and writing in a kind of homemade cowboy/Yankee drawl. But Pound was not really a Westerner; he spent less than two years in Hailey, where his father, Homer, briefly registered mining claims. The family moved to New York and then to Wyncote, near Philadelphia, which is where Pound was reared and educated. Homer worked in the Philadelphia Mint; Pound's mother, Isabel, was a New Yorker. Pound spent two years at the University of Pennsylvania, then transferred to Hamilton College, graduating in 1905.

Pound came to Europe in 1908, when he was twenty-two, after getting kicked out of the graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania. (Later in his career, he several times applied to Penn to receive his doctorate on the basis of work published, but was turned down.) Pound resisted the philological approach to literature that he was taught at Penn, since philology considered itself a science and above critical judgment, and Pound was consumed with a passion for critical judgment. He thought that the whole purpose of studying the past was to discover the principles of good writing—"the search for sound criteria," he called it—and his early poetry is a kind of creative philology, consisting largely of promiscuously free translations and reanimations of the literature of half a dozen expired traditions: Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Provençal, medieval Italian, eighth-century Chinese, and fourteenth-century Japanese. (After decades of frustratingly under-edited New Directions reprints, virtually all of Pound's poetry and translations, apart from the "Cantos," are available in a single Library of America volume, expertly edited, with annotation, by Richard Sieburth.)

Moody's book is a biography more of the work than of the man. Pound's love affairs, friendships, and quarrels and the intellectual and artistic culture within which he operated are mentioned, but



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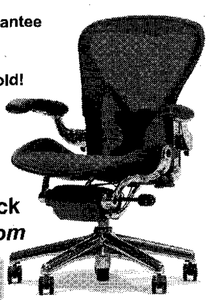

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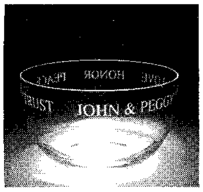

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they're not endowed with much explanatory power. Moody treats Pound as a poet whose primary concern was writing poetry, and his pages are devoted mainly to patient, intelligent, and prudently sympathetic readings of the contents of the twenty-one books Pound produced between 1905 and 1920, beginning with "Hilda's Book," which he wrote for his girlfriend Hilda Doolittle (later the poet H.D.), and ending with the work he called his "farewell to London," the self-deprecating satire "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley." Given the enormous variety of Pound's production in this period, Moody's gloss is elegant: he thinks that Pound (with a little help from his friends) grounded poetry in the everyday. He did this in two ways. He campaigned, as a prolific and bumptious critic, against the aesthetes and the Symbolists—the avant-garde of the late nineteenth century. And he formulated an aesthetic that was intended to preserve poetry's privileged status, but without the Symbolist's mysticism or the aesthete's cult of the beautiful. Pound took the merely poetical out of poetry. He did not believe that (in the words of the preface to "The Picture of Dorian Gray") "all art is quite useless." He thought that poetry had a kind of power. He believed, Moody says, "that 'the perfect rhythm joined to the perfect word' would energize the motor forces of emotion and will and illuminate the intelligence, and that the result would be more enlightened living."

"Direct treatment of the 'thing' " was the formula of the movement that Pound invented, in 1912: Imagism. In the Imagist model, the writer is a sculptor. Technique consists of chipping away everything superfluous in order to reveal the essential form within. "It took you ninety-seven words to do it," Pound is reported to have remarked to a young literary aspirant who had handed him a new poem. "I find it could have been managed in fifty-six." He claimed that his best-known short poem, "In a Station of the Metro," took a year and a half to write, and that he had cut it down from thirty lines:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

The form "made new" here is, of course, the haiku: two images juxtaposed to evoke a sensation—in this case, according to Pound, the sensation of beauty. It's important to recognize, though, that the subject of the poem is not "these faces"; the subject is "the apparition." (Otherwise, the first three words would be superfluous, subject to the Imagist razor.) The faces are not what matters. What matters is the impression they make in the mind of a poet. That is where the work of association takes place. This is what poets do: they connect an everyday *x* with an unexpected *y*. "Apparition" also reminds us, as Hugh Kenner pointed out in "The Pound Era," that the poem takes place under the ground: the people are experienced as ghosts, the subway as a visit to the underworld. (Kenner thought that the association with petals alludes to the Persephone myth, the cycle of death and rebirth.)

When Pound abandoned Imagism, around 1914, he did so noisily, and in the name of another doctrine, which he (along with Wyndham Lewis) named Vorticism. The trope in a Vorticist poem is the Vortex—although, as Moody rightly says, a Vortex is just an Image by another name. The key notion now is energy. (Pound and Lewis had very much in mind Filippo Marinetti's Futurism, an artistic and literary movement that had a vogue in England shortly before the war. They affected to despise Marinetti as a showman, but they were, stylistically, his imitators.) "The vortex is the point of maximum energy," Pound explained in *BLAST*, the magazine that he and Lewis produced, and that ran for two issues. "All experience rushes into this vortex. . . . All the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the future, is pregnant in the vortex, NOW." The cluster of associations triggered by the apparition of the faces—Odysseus' descent into Hades, Dante's visit to the Inferno, Persephone and Demeter—is present in the twentieth-century subway, but only for those who can see. "Swift perception of relations, hallmark of genius," Pound wrote.

As Moody concedes, somewhat reluctantly, not every reader is a genius, and this can lead, in Pound, to many conundrums. Moody spends several pages, for example, puzzling out the opening lines of Canto IV:

> Palace in smoky light,
> Troy but a heap of smouldering
>   boundary stones,
> ANAXIFORMINGES! Aurunculeia!
> Hear me. Cadmus of Golden Prows!

Most readers will get the reference to Troy, but the rest is, well, Greek. Moody thinks that the palace in the first line is Agamemnon's (although there is nothing about "smoky light" that would make this necessary, and other commentators have seen an allusion to Euripides' play "The Trojan Women"). "ANAXIFORMINGES" is from a poem by Pindar; "Aurunculeia" is from a poem by Catullus; Cadmus was the brother of Europa and the founder of Thebes. Even with the allusions identified, there remains the question of what to make of this particular cluster. What *about* Troy, Agamemnon, Cadmus, and so on makes for significance? Moody works it out (something to do with cities, women, music, and ravishment), but, by the end, any notion of the "direct treatment of the 'thing' " has vanished. The perception of relations is anything but swift.

The seed of the trouble lies in what most people find the least problematic aspect of the Imagist aesthetic: the insistence on "the perfect word," *le mot juste*. This seems a promise to get language up to the level of experience: artifice and verbiage are shorn away, and words point directly to the objects they name. Language becomes transparent; we experience the world itself. "When words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish," Pound wrote in 1915. This is a correspondence theory of language with a vengeance. We might doubt the promise by noting that in ordinary speech we repeat, retract, contradict, embellish, and digress continually in order to make our meaning more precise. No one likes to be required to answer a question yes or no, because things are never that simple. This is not because individual words are too weak; it's because they are too powerful. They can mean too many things. ("Palace in smoky light": could this be Buckingham Palace in the fog?) So we add more words, and embed our clauses in more clauses, in order to mute language, modify it, and reduce it to the modesty of our intentions. President Clinton was right: "is" *does* have many meanings, and we need to be allowed to explain the particular one we have in mind. In "The Cantos," Pound became the prisoner of his own technique, and he must have found his poem unfinishable (he never did end it) because he couldn't control the significances his images unleashed. "New Cantos form themselves out of schemes to make sense of old Cantos," the critic Daniel Albright has said, "so the story of 'The Cantos' comprises two intertwined stories, one concerning Pound's writing of the poem, the other concerning Pound's interpretations of what he had already written." The poem kept metastasizing meaning, a Vortex battening on itself.

"He was in his own way a hero of his culture, a genuine representative of both its more enlightened impulses and its self-destructive contradictions," Moody says about Pound. This seems fair. Pound was, in the end, a poet's poet—he *looked* like a poet—and, despite the shambles of his political beliefs and the limitations of his poetics, he does stand for something. His claims for literature were free of supernatural mystification, and he believed that the proper organization of language was supremely important. If you are a poet, or any serious kind of writer, you have to believe that, whether you think Pound's formula is workable or not. Getting the words right is, at a minimum, part of the therapy.

Pound was also, and by his own account, a failure.

> That I lost my center
>   fighting the world.
> The dreams clash
>   and are shattered—
> that I tried to make a paradiso
>   terrestre,

he wrote in notes for the final cantos. Kenner's title was deliberately ironic: the point of "The Pound Era" is that a Pound era never happened. The hopes of the prewar avant-garde, the artistic excitement of the years between 1908 and 1914, when the modernist movement spread throughout Europe, died in the trenches and the camps. "Dreams clash and are shattered": two wars of annihilation destroyed the aspirations of poets and painters to be the authors of an earthly paradise. Pound was, in a way, a war casualty, too; but he outlived almost all his literary and artistic contemporaries. He died in 1972, in Venice, at the age of eighty-seven. In his last years, he did not speak. ♦

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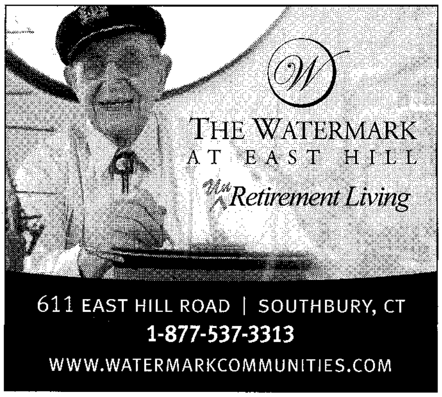

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POP MUSIC

THE GERBIL'S REVENGE

Auto-Tune corrects a singer's pitch. It also distorts—a grand tradition in pop.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Tourists black out reflective retinas in snapshots before printing them, and millions of people refer to strangers they've never spoken to as friends, because they've connected through a social-networking platform. The transition from living in the stubborn physical world to managing a life that is split between platforms, where the ability to change aspects of your identity (at least digitally) is always an option, is becoming more common. It should come as no surprise, then, that singers sometimes choose to correct recorded flaws in pitch with modern software, like Antares's Auto-Tune.

Thanks to Auto-Tune, T-Pain's vocal hooks can sound delirious.

Andy Hildebrand, Auto-Tune's inventor, spent eighteen years in a field called seismic data exploration, a branch of the oil industry. He worked in signal processing, using audio to map the earth's subsurface. His technique involved a mathematical model called autocorrelation. The layers below the earth's surface could be mapped by sending sound waves—dynamite charges work nicely in unpopulated areas—into the earth and then recording their reflections with a geophone. As it happened, autocorrelation could detect pitch as well as oil, and Hildebrand, who had taken some music courses, turned his engineering skills toward pop.

Most of the time, Auto-Tune is used imperceptibly, to correct flat or sharp notes. The New York producer Tom Beaujour, who records rock bands that sound nothing like contemporary R. & B. or pop, says that it gets used, in one way or another, in almost every session that he works on. Often, it solves logistical problems: an artist has left the studio and has no opportunity to return just to re-sing one or two off notes.

But pitch correction has also taken on a second life, as an effect. You've probably heard it, most recently on the No. 1 song in the country, Lil Wayne's lazy, mildly naughty rap "Lollipop." Auto-Tune, properly torqued up, is the rare edit that calls attention to itself. Auto-Tune software detects pitch, and when a vocal is routed through Auto-Tune, and a setting called "retune speed" is set to zero, warbling begins. This, roughly, is what happens: Auto-Tune locates the pitch of a recorded vocal, and moves that recorded information to the nearest "correct" note in a scale, which is selected by the user. With the speed set to zero, unnaturally rapid corrections eliminate portamento, the musical term for the slide between two pitches. Portamento is a natural aspect of speaking and singing, central to making people sound like people. A nonmusical example of portamento would be "upspeak," a verbal tic common in some people under thirty. (Can you imagine the end of every sentence rising in pitch? Like a question?) Processed at zero speed, Auto-Tune turns the lolling curves of the human voice into a zigzag of right-angled steps. These steps may represent "perfect" pitches, but when sung pitches alternate too quickly the result sounds unnatural, a fluttering that is described by some engineers as "the gerbil" and by others as "robotic."

The first popular example of Auto-Tune's distorting effect was Cher's 1998 hit "Believe," produced by Mark Taylor and Brian Rawling. During the first verse, Auto-Tune makes the phrase "I can't break through" wobble so much that it's hard to discern. More successful is the gentler variation in the following line, "so sad that you're leaving," which highlights the software's strength. Auto-Tune can produce a controlled version of losing control, hinting at various histrionic stations

PUNY

of the human voice—crying, sighing, laughing—without troubling the singer. It is notable that "Believe" 's big chorus—"Do you believe in life after love?"—is delivered (mostly) in a full, human-sounding voice, with no robotic modifications. You can only feel so bad for a robot.

Before "Believe," Auto-Tune was a closely held producers' secret. ("They didn't want to be known to manipulate the pitch of sound," Hildebrand says.) After "Believe," radical pitch alteration showed up repeatedly—in, among other places, a chunk of Madonna's "Music" album, from 2000, Jamaican dancehall singles, and pop hits like Jo-Jo's "Too Little Too Late," which uses a human-to-robot ratio very similar to that of "Believe." In the manual accompanying Auto-Tune's fifth-release version, the zero speed setting is described as "the Cher Effect."

No one has used Auto-Tune's zero speed setting more consistently and successfully than the R. & B. singer T-Pain. Born Faheem Najm, in Tallahassee, he has become such a common guest on pop records that in a single week last year he was featured on four singles in the top ten of the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart, including the No. 1 song, Chris Brown's "Kiss Kiss." In the same way that the dry, flat drum sounds in Fleetwood Mac's "Rumours" will forever say "mid-seventies," T-Pain and Auto-Tune will forever remind people of the late aughts.

T-Pain, who is currently working on his third album, "Thr33 Ringz," spoke to me on the phone from his studio in Miami. He first heard the Auto-Tune effect on a song by Jennifer Lopez—he doesn't remember which one—and borrowed it for a mixtape appearance in 2003. He says it's no trade secret that he uses Auto-Tune with the retune speed set to zero, and likes to recall a time he spent selling fish out of a truck with his father in Tallahassee: "My dad said, 'They can know what you're using, but they'll never know how to use it. They can see that we're using salt and pepper.'"

The Auto-Tuned T-Pain is rarely a mopey presence. In his hands, the program becomes pop music's rose-colored glasses, or a balloon's worth of helium inhaled. His vocals hang, flickering, and suggest not a technological intervention but a chemical one. His vocal hooks sound delirious, not desperate.

Someone once asked Hildebrand if Auto-Tune was evil. He responded, "Well, my wife wears makeup. Is that evil?" Evil may be overstating the case, but makeup is an apt analogy: there is nothing natural about recorded music. Whether the engineer merely tweaks a few bum notes or makes a singer tootle like Robby the Robot, recorded music is still a composite of sounds that may or may not have happened in real time. An effect is always achieved, and not necessarily the one intended. Aren't some of the most entertaining and fruitful sounds in pop—distortion, whammy bars, scratching—the result of glorious abuse of the tools? At this late date, it's hard to see how the invisible use of tools could imply an inauthentic product, as if a layer of manipulation were standing between the audience and an unsullied object. In reality, the unsullied object is the Sasquatch of music. Even a purely live recording is a distortion and paraphrasing of an acoustic event.

Sir George Martin, via e-mail, wrote to me about his work with John Lennon, one of the most famously processed voices in pop history. "It's true that John was never satisfied with the sound of his voice," Martin explained. "He failed to realize that what he heard came through the bones of his body and was not his true sound. He was always looking for perfection, and in his imagination his voice was always superior to the sound of anything on tape." To paraphrase, what we hear on Beatles records is Lennon's imagination. T-Pain's deployment of Auto-Tune is a similar assertion of self, no different in kind from the older, more traditional tricks of tape-splicing, double-tracking the voice, and adding a little reverb.

When I asked T-Pain if he could ever forgo Auto-Tune, he said, "I got a song on my album about my kids. I ain't use it on that one." ♦

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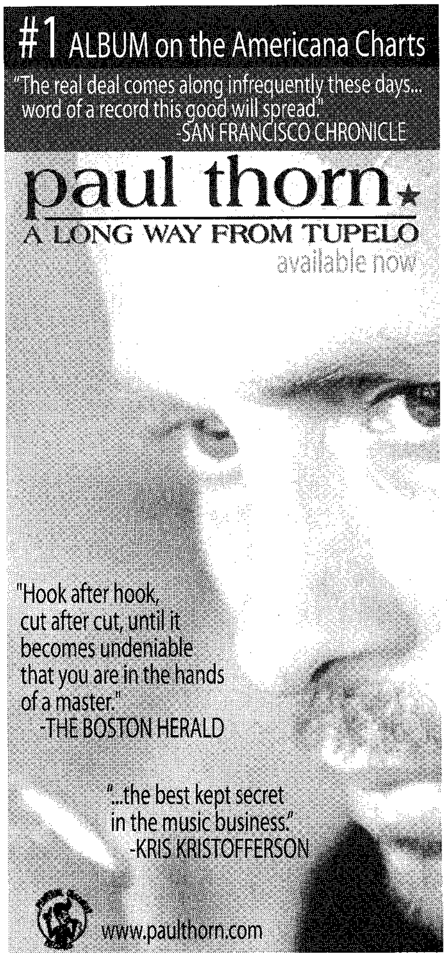
Sasha Frere-Jones demonstrates Auto-Tune.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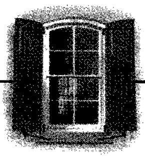

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THE ART WORLD

FUNHOUSE

A Jeff Koons retrospective.

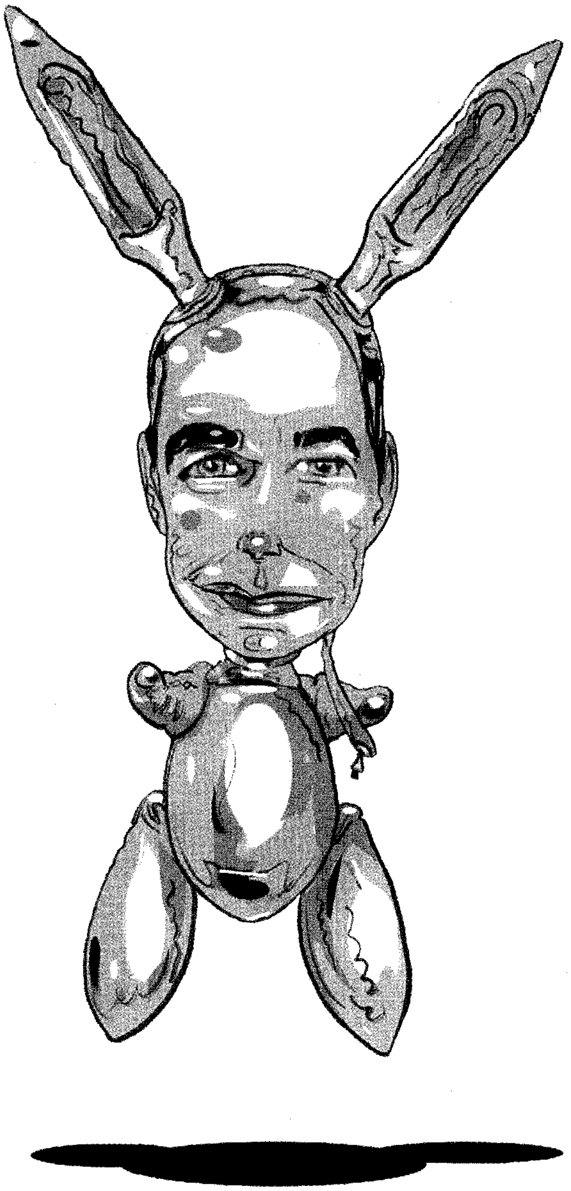
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

There is something nightmarish about Jeff Koons. The fifty-three-year-old American enchanter and provocateur is a major artist, in the old sense of one who edits the past and sketches the future of an art—in this case, sculpture. (Koons's uncannily mediocre paintings suggest an insensibility in two dimensions that is as amazing, in its way, as his genius in three.) Major artists X-ray the cultures that give rise to them. A Koons retrospective that has opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago occasions queasy wonderment, on the order of "We've come to this?," and the perhaps reluctant conclusion "Uh-huh." It confirms Koons's scope as an artist unconfined by the conventional art world, whose work addresses everybody, including but not limited to those who may discern influences of Courbet, Brancusi, Duchamp, Dali, Warhol, and Disney. I remember my first encounter, in Germany, in 1992, with Koons's famous "Puppy," the forty-three-foot-high Scottie dog enveloped in living flowers. As I was judiciously taking descriptive and analytical notes, a bus arrived bearing a group of severely disabled children in wheelchairs. They went wild with delight. Abruptly feeling absurd, I shut my notebook and took instruction from the kids' unequivocal verdict.

The material mastery, conceptual perfect pitch, and idealist beauty of most of the objects on display in Chicago defy resistance. Can you dislike "Balloon Dog (Orange)" (1994-2000), a ten-foot-high representation, in chromium stainless steel with a coppery tint, of a cartoony canine formed with twists in a long balloon? (A yellowish twin of the work is one of three Koonses currently installed on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum, where it gathers funhouse reflections of viewers and the surrounding city, under blue skies turned velvety green.) If you manage not to enjoy the lustrous pooch, I don't understand you. But if you're afflicted by an attendant feeling of intellectual free fall, in a vacuum of identifiable emotion, we can talk. Koons is hugely significant—grandly engaging themes of childhood, wealth, sex, and (as with an aqualung cast in bronze) death—while finally signifying precious little. That's my nightmare: an intimation that intelligence is obsolete in a world where things are either blazingly obvious or pitch dark.

One of Koons's early works reproduces a photograph of him, at the age of six, wielding a crayon and gazing out with the unearthly confidence that remains his usual mien today. He was born in York, Pennsylvania. His father was a furniture dealer and interior decorator, his mother a housewife and seamstress. (She made wedding dresses.) At the age of twelve, he was painting copies of Old Masters, which his father sold in his store. He studied art in Baltimore and, for an important year, at the Art Institute of Chicago. A companion show at the M.C.A., "Everything's Here: Jeff Koons and His Experience of Chicago," features local artists, the so-called "Imagists"—Ed Paschke, Jim Nutt, H. C. Westermann, and others—whose brassy populism gave him a maverick orientation that came in handy when he tackled New York, in 1977. The School of the Art Institute awarded Koons an honorary doctorate this year. In his acceptance speech, he urged the students to participate boldly in the world, using art as a "platform" for themselves. (He likes that word, attributing its implications for him to his mother's family, which was active in Pennsylvania politics.) Making the graduates a gift of his ambition, he mimed passing a basketball to them. I have been told that hundreds of hands flew up to catch the spectral orb.

In New York, Koons manned the membership desk of the Museum of Modern Art, evincing formidable salesmanship while immersing himself in the collection. He staked his budding penchant for expensively fabricated art by working as a commodities broker on Wall Street for six years. (Today, he has a factory in Chelsea with ninety regular assistants.) Almost from the start, his work has come in thematic series, or product lines. "Pre-New" assemblages of plastic flowers, toys, and mirrors gave way to "The New": fluorescent-lit, spotless vacuum cleaners, hermetically sealed in Plexiglas cases. "Equilibrium" involved basketballs floating beneath the surface of chemically treated water in glass tanks. For "Luxury and Degradation," Koons made stainless-steel casts of liquor containers, including a novelty "Jim Beam—J. W. Turner Train" filled with bourbon, and reprinted liquor-advertising posters in seductively intensified colors. Stainless-steel "Statuary" yielded vernacular curios, such as a bust of Louis XIV, a statue of Bob Hope, and Koons's iconic masterpiece "Rabbit," the gleaming cast of an inflatable bunny. "Banality" consisted of glazed-ceramic and painted-wood blowups, on pedestals, of such high-kitsch treasures as a statue of Michael Jackson with his chimpanzee, Bubbles. (The sensational début of "Banality," in 1988, with simultaneous, identical shows at galleries in New York, Cologne, and Chicago, was publicized by memorable print ads, in *Artforum*, which posed Koons with bikini babes, schoolchildren, and pigs.) This brings us to 1989 and the artist's strangest excursion, "Made in Heaven."



Koons has worked in thematic series, or product lines.

ISTVAN BANYAI

Koons had met (and in 1991 married) Ilona Staller, the Hungarian-born porn star and member of the Italian parliament. He issued a torrent of sculptures and photographic works presenting the two of them, singly or flagrantly together, as a god and goddess of carefree amour. (A sampling of these works, including the unambiguous "Ilona's Asshole," is walled off, with a parental warning, in Chicago.) His declared "platform," in this instance, was frankly messianic. He has said, "I had to go to the depths of my own sexuality, my own morality, to be able to remove fear, guilt and shame from myself. All of this has been removed from the viewer." (If only.) Koons's consummate command of materials proved unequal to the intricacies of another person. The couple divorced in 1994. Koons was awarded custody of their two-year-old son, Ludwig, but Staller absconded to Italy with the child. Koons, who remarried and has four more children, has reportedly spent four million dollars in legal fees to retrieve the boy. (When, in Chicago, I chanced to ask his view of the Presidential election, he said of his senator, "I can't vote for Hillary Clinton. She didn't help Ludwig.") I've never known what to do with the "Made in Heaven" works, other than to gawk at them in vague alarm.

Koons's subsequent series—"Celebration," "Easyfun," "Easyfun-Ethereal," "Elephant," "Popeye," "Hulk Elvis"—are less distinct, and are highly uneven. Many of the works are big paintings in a collagelike mode, combining fragments of photographic imagery clipped from magazines or staged by the artist. Reminiscences of original, superior artists—Rauschenberg and Rosenquist, as well as Warhol—do Koons no favors. Made largely by assistants, the pictures are painstakingly crafted and impressive in technique. But these are secondary virtues. Painting is a medium of concerted imagination, symbolizing consciousness. It's not a flat dump for miscellaneous ideas. The anonymous touch and the no-comment form that serve Koons well in sculpture, by streamlining the shock of preposterous objects, deaden on canvas. This problem extends to some recent sculptures, such as a meticulously painted blowup, in aluminum, of an inflated swim-toy lobster, hung from the ceiling. I'm wowed by its color—echt plastic red—but miss the point of a representation that might as well, with far less fuss, be the real thing. Koons may be thinking too much. (He says that he associates lobsters with Dali. So what?) But then there's "Hanging Heart (Blue/Silver)" (1994-2006), an immense steel heart in dreamy blue with steel ribbons in glittering silver, which greets visitors to the show. Passing beneath it, you sense its great weight, perhaps with a touch of physical dread like that stirred by Richard Serra sculptures. It looks (and is) incredibly costly—and as sweet as dime-store perfume. It apostrophizes our present era of plutocratic democracy, sinking scads of money in a gesture of solidarity with lower-class taste. Noblesse oblige, never mind that noblesse isn't what it used to be. (Neither is obligation.) We might wish for a better artist to manifest our time, but that would probably amount to wanting a better time. ◆

NEWYORKER.COM

Slide show: The art of Jeff Koons.

ON TELEVISION

THAT SEVENTIES SHOW

CBS’s “Swingtown.”

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Couples gone wild: sex, drugs, and bad music in Mike Kelley’s suburbia.

QUICKHONEY

“Swingtown,” a new summer drama on CBS, is set squarely and pointedly in 1976, the year of the Bicentennial, the year that America—having left Vietnam, having lanced the boil that was Richard Nixon and not yet become annoyed by the President it was about to elect—started to maybe, just a little bit, fall in love with itself again. That, anyway, is one of any number of possible one-sentence summations of the time. By 1976, some of the currents of the sixties—women’s liberation and youth culture—had become mainstream; family men sported longer sideburns; schoolteachers looked a little more unbuttoned; mothers started wearing pants and shorter skirts, and going to work; and divorce had lost most of its shock value. At the same time, the popular culture being generated largely stank—and people just went along with it! It was all so mystifying. And the clothes—ghastly polyester shirts and dresses with geometric patterns that would give M. C. Escher vertigo. In kitchen décor, avocado and harvest gold had shoved white aside. Let’s not even talk about the music. Movies were one of the few exceptions to the horror; “Taxi Driver” was released in early 1976.

This is the world of “Swingtown,” which was created by Mike Kelley, whose production and writing credits include “The O.C.,” “Jericho,” and “Providence.” He grew up in Winnetka, Illinois, the affluent Chicago suburb where the show is set, and turned nine that year. In a recent *Times* interview, Kelley described his childhood. “I like to think of myself as a ‘bannister-slat’ kid,” he said, meaning that he often sat on the staircase and looked down at his parents’ parties, and was hyperaware of being an observer of the mysterious rituals of the adults he lived among. Of course, all kids watch their parents’ parties—and everything else about their parents—so the problem for a TV writer is how to make a show that goes beyond that perspective and yet doesn’t allow sweeping, *Newsweek*-y generalities (like the ones in my first paragraph) to stand in for particular experiences of the kind that real people have and fictional characters need. Kelley appears to get that; in the interview, he said that the hook of the show may be its juicy depiction of wife-swapping, but that it’s really about the specific ways in which people embraced the changes of the time. You wouldn’t guess that from the show itself; the first ten minutes of the first episode are like a checklist of seventies references—a woman smoking on an airplane, a woman drinking a can of Tab (I lost a bet with myself over how soon that would show up), a girl putting on Dr. Scholl’s sandals—and the opening scene turns out to be a lewd joke, a kind of homage to “Airplane!,” which, of course, was itself a parody, leading you to wonder right off the bat whether this is going to be merely a late-night version of “That ’70s Show.”

In that first scene, we see a handsome, if slightly sleazy-looking, airline pilot, his jacket and shirt off, who is speaking to the cabin on his cockpit radio, while the top of a blond head moves up and down at the bottom of the screen. (The pilot’s sleazy look is a combination of the International Male mustache and the fact that he’s played by Grant Show, whom you will remember, whether you admit it or not, as Jake, the dangerously sexy downwardly mobile biker on “Melrose Place.”) Can this be, you think? Of course not; it may be 10 P.M., but this is still network TV. When the woman stands up, we realize that she’s a housemotherly, middle-aged stewardess who’s helping him clean up some coffee that a young stewardess accidentally spilled on him. Shortly afterward, that young thing is in bed with the pilot, Tom, and his wife, Trina, who’s played by Lana Parrilla. (And, shortly after that, the wife goes to the kitchen for the Tab. Threesomes—they just make you so darn *thirsty*.) These two scenes sound pretty risqué, and they are, but they also seem slightly unworthy, like dirty jokes that aren't dirty enough and so seem even dirtier, in the same way that Bob Eubanks, the icky host of "The Newlywed Game," made the expression "making whoopee" sound filthy.

It's the Fourth of July weekend, and a new couple is moving into the house across the street from Tom and Trina's—the upwardly mobile but likable Susan and Bruce Miller (Molly Parker, who shone in "Deadwood," and Jake Davenport, from the original, British version of "Coupling"). Susan and Bruce are leaving behind, in their old, lower-upper-middle-class neighborhood nearby, Roger and Janet (Josh Hopkins and Miriam Shor), who are their best friends in that slightly tense way that suburban couples sometimes are: the two men don't really know each other that well; one of the husbands doesn't like the other wife; and one of the women is envious and openly critical of the other. If they hadn't lived near each other and had kids the same age—two young boys who are friends—they'd have had nothing to do with each other. Janet, a hyper-proper near-hysteric, senses that she's going to lose Susan as a friend because of the move, and alternately fawns over and needles her.

Kelley and his producing partner, Alan Poul (who was an executive producer of "Six Feet Under" and also directed a number of episodes), appear to have been uninterested in giving Janet a real thought or a genuine feeling. She's the most rigid of the six main adult characters, who are distributed along the continuum of receptivity to change, and it's notable—and not in a good way—that she is treated as a joke by Kelley and Poul. (There is a seventh character, Gail, played by Kate Norby, who lives next door to Susan and Bruce's new house; she's a blowsy, self-disrespecting cocaine addict, hiding in the shadows—she wears sunglasses indoors and covers her windows with aluminum foil, to keep out the glare of societal disapproval.) Janet has been made to be the stereotypical Creature from the Suburban Lagoon—a Stepford wife, an American Beauty, the distaff half of Ozzie and Harridan, a Mommie Dearest, a Desperate Housewife, and a distillation of every drag performance you've ever seen. It doesn't help that Shor plays up the character's risibility; following a party at Tom and Trina's that Janet has stormed out of after coming upon some disturbing sexual activity in the basement (it involved more than two people), Janet is seen at home on her knees, in full housewife regalia—chest-protector apron and rubber gloves—maniacally scrubbing her oven. Her husband hopelessly asks her, "Why don't you come to bed?" You'd have to have a heart of Teflon not to laugh when she spits at him, "Because we live in a pigsty!" This is TV at its TV-est.

Much of the dialogue in "Swingtown" is as unfortunately memorable as that outburst, partly because none of the adults are allowed to have any self-awareness. They say things like "Who's up for a Harvey Wallbanger?" At her Fourth of July party, Trina holds a little box out to Susan and says, "Quaalude?," as if she were offering an Altoid. Susan says she's never had one. "Then I insist," Trina says. "It'll take the edge off." But Susan hasn't indicated that she has an edge, or, if she does, that it needs taking off. This is boilerplate seventies-speak, and it doesn't get at anything beyond itself. AMC's "Mad Men," as punctiliously faithful to the externals of the late fifties and early sixties as "Swingtown" is to the mid-seventies, cracks open the dreams and myths of its time; there's brutality to that show, a willingness to look at the blood pumping through the era's heart of darkness. But "Swingtown" is a little too fond of the seventies to reveal anything about them that we don't already know.

According to the *Times* piece, Kelley and Poul wanted to combine elements of the movie "Boogie Nights" and the TV show "The Wonder Years." If you can describe your show that easily, you can sell it to the networks but not necessarily to viewers. ("Swingtown" recalls any number of movies and TV shows, from "Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice" to "The Ice Storm," with its parents and teen-agers living parallel lives and a smart, odd teen-age girl riding around alone on a bicycle.) "Swingtown," as part of its fetish for authenticity, has impeccably and precisely horrible costumes and sets, but, to a serious fault, it makes use of the most overplayed music of the period. "Dream Weaver," "Dancing in the Moonlight," "Come and Get Your Love," and other such beige tunes are thrown one after another onto the soundtrack, until your ears are crying. With few exceptions, the songs are not integrated into the show—the characters don't hear them. They're there just to pander to viewers of a certain age. The characters in "Swingtown" may be going through big personal changes and having, along with their free sex, some rough times, but I envy them: they have to live through the seventies only once. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, June 15th. Finalists in the May 26th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 30th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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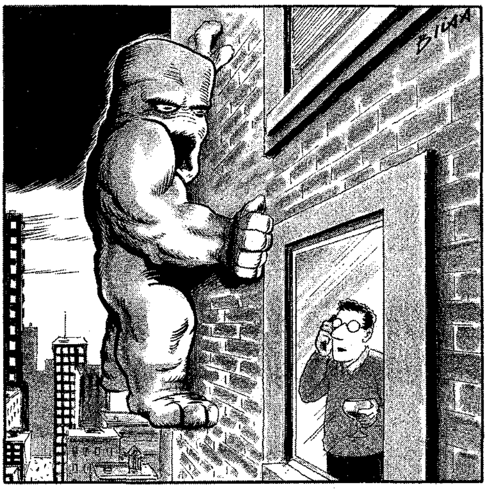
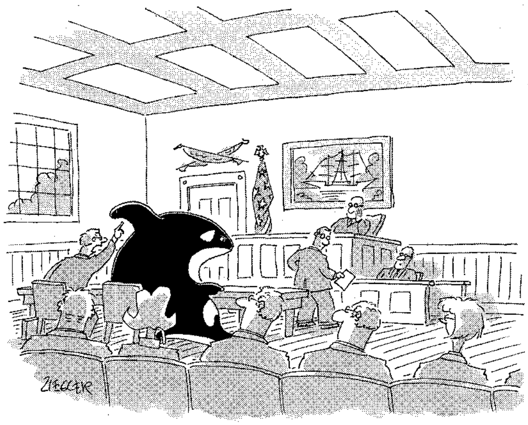


“O.K. I'm at the window. To the right? Your right or my right?”
Patrick House, Palo Alto, Calif.

AFTER JACK KIRBY



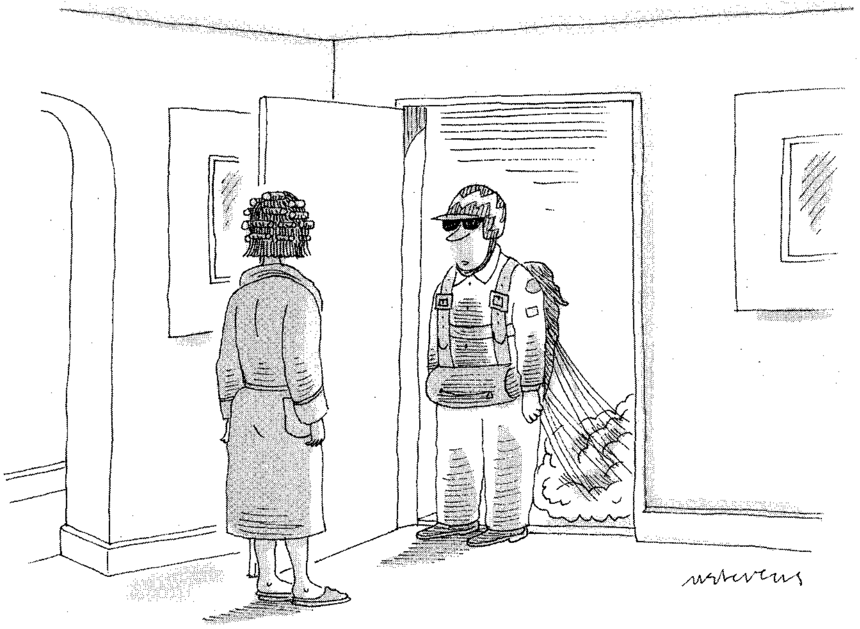
THE FINALISTS

“Objection, Your Honor! Alleged killer whale.”
Will Simon, Brooklyn, N.Y.

“My client maintains that the penguin had a gun!”
Dan Von Kohorn, Chestnut Hill, Mass.

“I demand a change of venue to a maritime court!”
S. Michael Ricciardi, Watchung, N.J.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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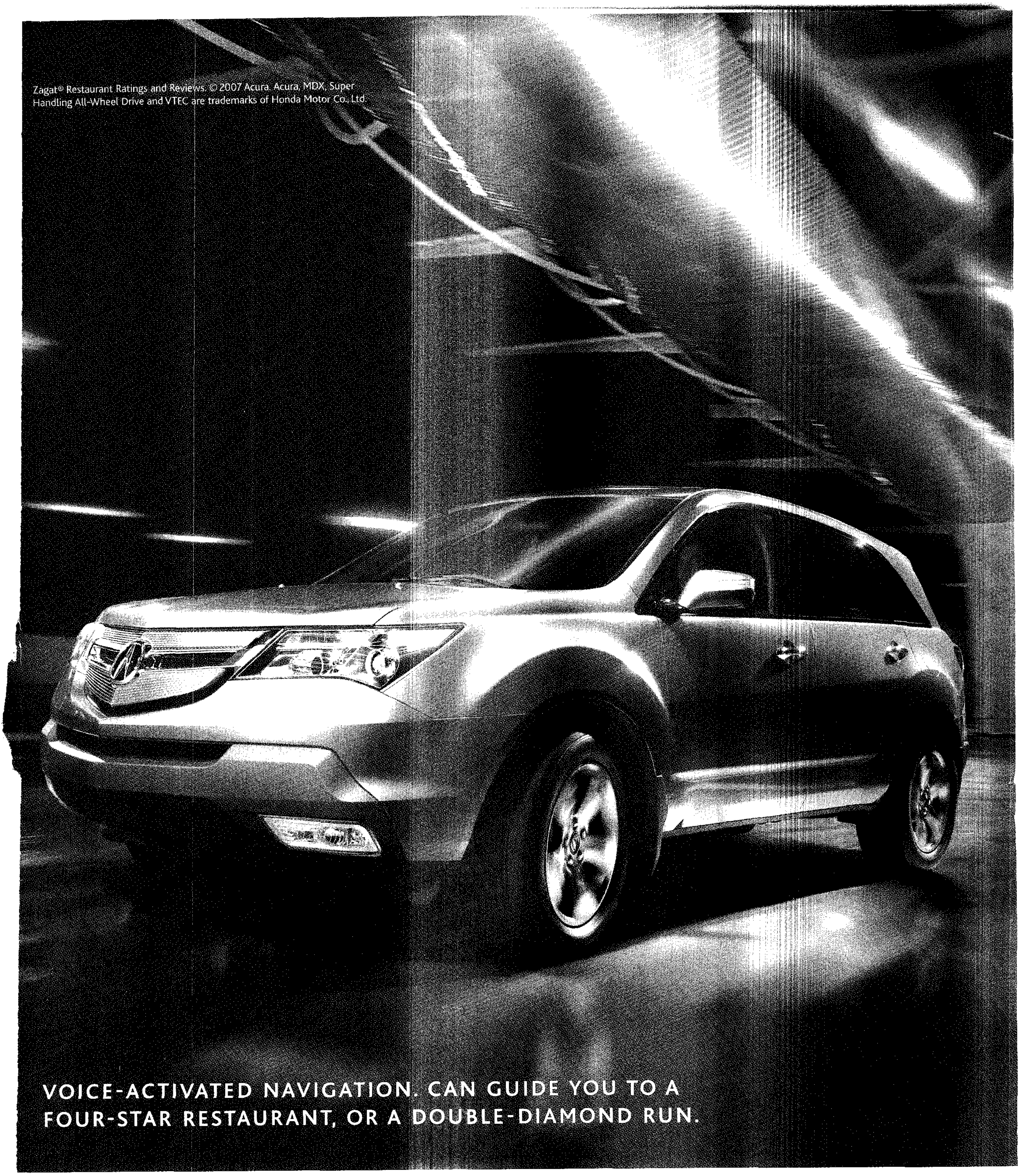

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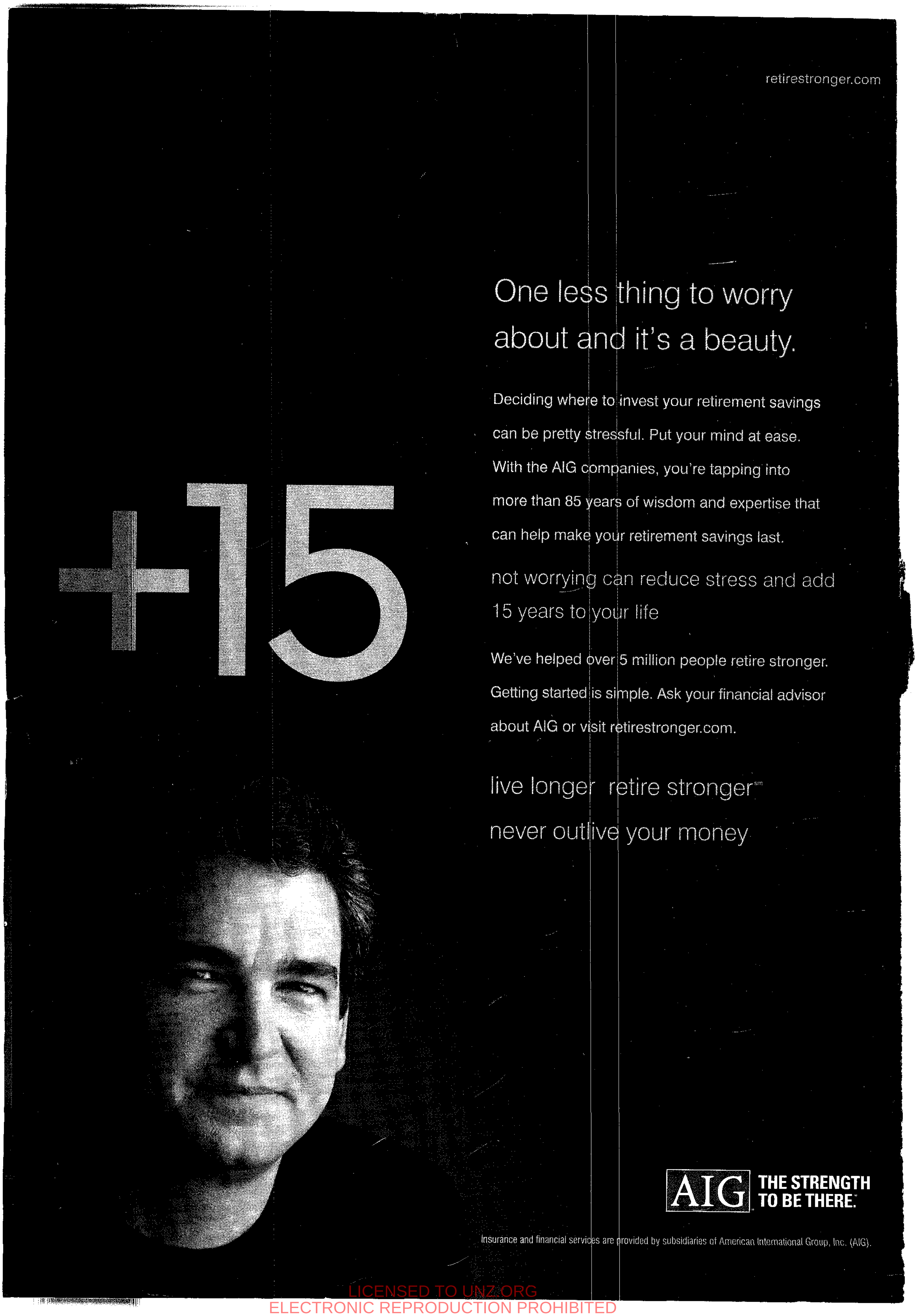

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